BELL'S READING BOOKS.

SELECT
PARABLES FROM NATURE.

BY THE LATE
MRS. ALFRED GATTY,
AUTHOR OF "AUNT JUDY'S TALES," ETC.

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'These books preceded letters, so parables were more ancient than arguments.'—LORD BACON.
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Opinions of the Press.

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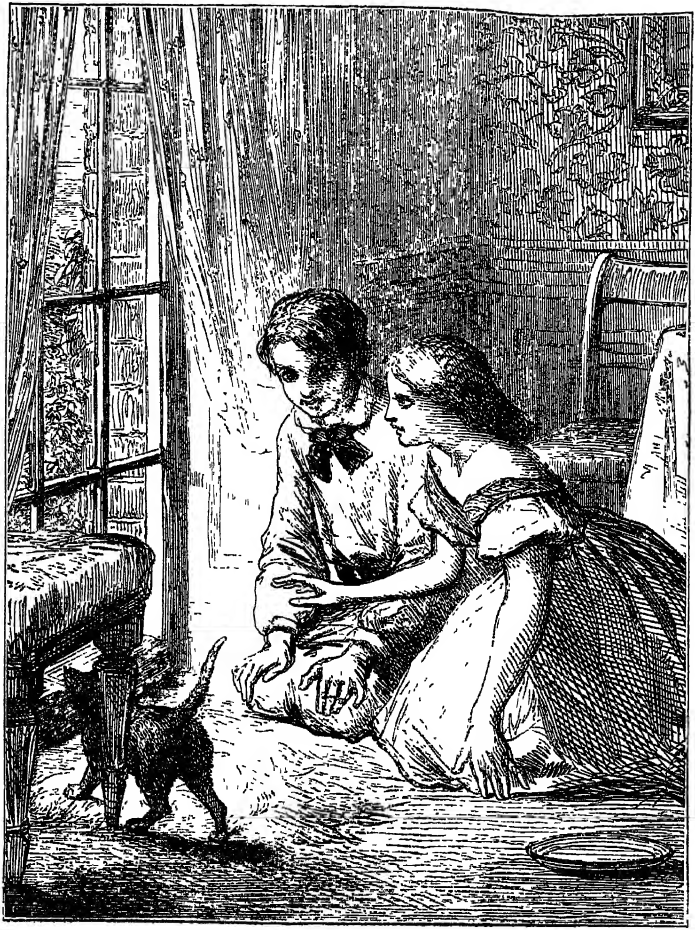
LONDON: GEORGE BELL & SONS, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.



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PARABLES FROM NATURE.

I.

A LESSON OF FAITH.

"If a man die, shall he live *again?* All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."—JOB xiv. 14.

"LET me hire you as a nurse for my poor children," said a Butterfly to a quiet Caterpillar, who was strolling along a cabbage-leaf in her odd lumbering way. "See these little eggs," continued the Butterfly; "I don't know how long it will be before they come to life, and I feel very sick and poorly, and if I should die, who will take care of my baby butterflies when I am gone? Will *you*, kind, mild, green Caterpillar? But you must mind what you give them to eat, Caterpillar!—they cannot, of course, live on *your* rough food. You must give them early dew, and honey from the flowers; and you must let them fly about only a little way at first; for, of course, one can't expect them to use their wings properly all at once. Dear me! it is a sad pity you cannot fly yourself. But I have no time to look for another nurse now, so you will do your best, I hope. Dear! dear! I cannot think what made me come and lay my eggs on a cabbage-leaf! What a place for young butterflies to be born upon! Still you will be kind, will you not, to the poor little ones? Here, take this gold-dust from my wings as a reward. Oh, how dizzy I am! Caterpillar! you will remember about the food——"

And with these words the Butterfly drooped her wings and died; and the green Caterpillar, who had not had the opportunity of even saying Yes or No to the request, was left standing alone by the side of the Butterfly's eggs.

"A pretty nurse she has chosen, indeed, poor lady!" exclaimed she, "and a pretty business I have in hand! Why, her senses must have left her, or she never would have asked a poor crawling creature like me to bring up her dainty little ones! Much they'll mind me, truly, when they feel the gay wings on their backs, and can fly away out of my sight whenever they choose! Ah! how silly some people are, in spite of their painted clothes and the gold-dust on their wings!"

However, the poor Butterfly was dead, and there lay the eggs on the cabbage-leaf; and the green Caterpillar had a kind heart, so she resolved to do her best. But she got no sleep that night, she was so very anxious. She made her back quite ache with walking all night round her young charges, for fear any harm should happen to them; and in the morning says she to herself—

"Two heads are better than one. I will consult some wise animal upon the matter, and get advice. How should a poor crawling creature like me know what to do without asking my betters?"

But still there was a difficulty—whom should the Caterpillar consult? There was the shaggy Dog who sometimes came into the garden. But he was so rough!—he would most likely whisk all the eggs off the cabbage-leaf with one brush of his tail, if she called him near to talk to her, and then she should never forgive herself. There was the Tom Cat, to be sure, who would sometimes sit at the foot of the apple-tree, basking himself and warming his fur in the sunshine; but he was so selfish and indifferent!—there was no hope of his giving himself the trouble to think

about butterflies' eggs. "I wonder which is the wisest of all the animals I know," sighed the Caterpillar, in great distress; and then she thought, and thought, till at last she thought of the Lark; and she fancied that because he went up so high, and nobody knew where he went to, he must be very clever, and know a great deal; for to go up very high (which *she* could never do) was the Caterpillar's idea of perfect glory.

Now, in the neighbouring corn-field there lived a Lark, and the Caterpillar sent a message to him, to beg him to come and talk to her; and when he came she told him all her difficulties, and asked him what she was to do, to feed and rear the little creatures so different from herself.

"Perhaps you will be able to inquire and hear something about it next time you go up high," observed the Caterpillar timidly.

The Lark said, "Perhaps he should;" but he did not satisfy her curiosity any further. Soon afterwards, however, he went singing upwards into the bright blue sky. By degrees his voice died away in the distance, till the green Caterpillar could not hear a sound. It is nothing to say she could not see him; for, poor thing! she never could see far at any time, and had a difficulty in looking upwards at all, even when she reared herself up most carefully, which she did now; but it was of no use, so she dropped upon her legs again, and resumed her walk round the Butterfly's eggs, nibbling a bit of the cabbage-leaf now and then as she moved along.

"What a time the Lark has been gone!" she cried, at last. "I wonder where he is just now! I would give all my legs to know! He must have flown up higher than usual this time, I do think! How I should like to know where it is that he goes to, and what he hears in that curious blue sky! He always sings in going up and coming down, but he never lets any secret out. He is very, very close!"

And the green Caterpillar took another turn round the Butterfly's eggs.

At last the Lark's voice began to be heard again. The Caterpillar almost jumped for joy, and it was not long before she saw her friend descend with hushed note to the cabbage-bed.

"News, news, glorious news, friend Caterpillar!" sang the Lark; "but the worst of it is, you won't believe me!"

"I believe everything I am told," observed the Caterpillar hastily.

"Well then, first of all, I will tell you what these little creatures are to eat"—and the Lark nodded his beak towards the eggs. "What do you think it is to be? Guess!"

"Dew, and the honey out of flowers, I am afraid," sighed the Caterpillar.

"No such thing, old lady! Something simpler than that. Something that *you* can get at quite easily."

"I can get at nothing quite easily but cabbage-leaves," murmured the Caterpillar, in distress.

"Excellent! my good friend," cried the Lark exultingly; "you have found it out. You are to feed them with cabbage-leaves."

"*Never!*" said the Caterpillar indignantly. "It was their dying mother's last request that I should do no such thing."

"Their dying mother knew nothing about the matter," persisted the Lark; "but why do you ask me, and then disbelieve what I say? You have neither faith nor trust."

"Oh, I believe everything I am told," said the Caterpillar.

"Nay, but you do not," replied the Lark; "you won't believe me even about the food, and yet that is but a beginning of what I have to tell you. Why, Caterpillar, what do you think those little eggs will turn out to be?"

"Butterflies, to be sure," said the Caterpillar.

"*Caterpillars!*" sang the Lark; "and you'll find it out in time;" and the Lark flew away, for he did not want to stay and contest the point with his friend.

"I thought the Lark had been wise and kind," observed the mild, green Caterpillar, once more beginning to walk round the eggs, "but I find that he is foolish and saucy instead. Perhaps he went up *too* high this time. Ah, it's a pity when people who soar so high are silly and rude nevertheless! Dear! I still wonder whom he sees, and what he does up yonder."

"I would tell you, if you would believe me," sang the Lark, descending once more.

"I believe everything I am told," reiterated the Caterpillar, with as grave a face as if it were a fact.

"Then I'll tell you something else," cried the Lark; "for the best of my news remains behind. *You will one day be a Butterfly yourself.*"

"Wretched bird!" exclaimed the Caterpillar, "you jest with my inferiority—now you are cruel as well as foolish. Go away! I will ask your advice no more."

"I told you you would not believe me," cried the Lark, nettled in his turn.

"I believe everything that I am told," persisted the Caterpillar; "that is"—and she hesitated,—"everything that it is *reasonable* to believe. But to tell me that butterflies' eggs are caterpillars, and that caterpillars leave off crawling and get wings, and become butterflies!——Lark! you are too wise to believe such nonsense yourself, for you know it is impossible."

"I know no such thing," said the Lark, warmly. "Whether I hover over the corn-fields of earth, or go up into the depths of the sky, I see so many wonderful things, I know no reason why there should not be more. Oh, Caterpillar! it is because you crawl, because you never get beyond your cabbage-leaf, that you call *any* thing *impossible*."

"Nonsense!" shouted the Caterpillar; "I know

what's possible, and what's not possible, according to my experience and capacity, as well as you do. Look at my long green body and these endless legs, and then talk to me about having wings and a painted feathery coat! Fool!——"

"And fool you! you would-be-wise Caterpillar!" cried the indignant Lark. "Fool, to attempt to reason about what you cannot understand! Do you not hear how my song swells with rejoicing as I soar upwards to the mysterious wonder-world above? Oh, Caterpillar! what comes to you from thence, receive as *I* do upon trust."

"That is what you call——"

"*Faith*," interrupted the Lark.

"How am I to learn Faith?" asked the Caterpillar.

At that moment she felt something at her side. She looked around—eight or ten little green caterpillars were moving about, and had already made a show of a hole in the cabbage-leaf. They had broken from the Butterfly's eggs!

Shame and amazement filled our green friend's heart, but joy soon followed; for, as the first wonder was possible, the second might be so too. "Teach me your lesson, Lark!" she would say; and the Lark sang to her of the wonders of the earth below, and of the heaven above. And the Caterpillar talked all the rest of her life to her relations of the time when she should be a Butterfly.

But none of them believed her. She nevertheless had learnt the Lark's lesson of faith, and when she was going into her chrysalis grave, she said—"I shall be a Butterfly some day!"

But her relations thought her head was wandering, and they said, "Poor thing!"

And when she was a Butterfly, and was going to die again, she said—

"I have known many wonders—I have faith—I can trust even now for what shall come next!"

II.

THE LAW OF AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE.

"Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?"—ACTS vii. 27.

A FINE young Working-bee left his hive, one lovely summer's morning, to gather honey from the flowers. The sun shone so brightly, and the air felt so warm, that he flew a long, long distance, till he came to some gardens that were very beautiful and gay; and there having roamed about, in and out of the flowers, buzzing in great delight, till he had so loaded himself with treasures that he could carry no more, he bethought himself of returning home. But, just as he was beginning his journey, he accidentally flew through the open window of a country house, and found himself in a large dining-room. There was a great deal of noise and confusion, for it was dinner-time, and the guests were talking rather loudly, so that the Bee got quite frightened. Still he tried to taste some rich sweetmeats that lay temptingly in a dish on the table, when all at once he heard a child exclaim with a shout, "Oh, there's a bee, let me catch him!" on which he rushed hastily back to (as he thought) the open air. But, alas! poor fellow, in another second he found that he had flung himself against a hard transparent wall! In other words, he had flown against the glass panes of the window, being quite unable, in his alarm and confusion, to distinguish the glass from the opening by which he had entered. This unexpected blow annoyed him much; and, having wearied himself in vain attempts to

find the entrance, he began to walk slowly and quietly up and down the wooden frame at the bottom of the panes, hoping to recover both his strength and composure.

Presently, as he was walking along, his attention was attracted by hearing the soft half-whispering voices of two children, who were kneeling down and looking at him.

Says the one to the other, "This is a working-bee, Sister; I see the pollen-bags under his thighs. Nice fellow! how busy he has been!"

"Does he make the pollen and honey himself?" whispered the Girl.

"Yes, he gets them from the insides of the flowers. Don't you remember how we watched the bees once, dodging in and out of the crocuses, how we laughed at them, they were so busy and fussy, and their dark coats looked so handsome against the yellow leaves? I wish I had seen this fellow loading himself to-day. But he does more than that. He builds the honey-comb, and does pretty nearly everything. He's a working-bee, poor wretch!"

"What is a working-bee? and why do you call him 'poor wretch,' Brother?"

"Why, don't you know, Uncle Collins says, all people are poor wretches who work for other people who don't work for themselves? and that is just what this bee does. There is the queen-bee in the hive, who does nothing at all but sit at home, give orders, and coddle the little ones; and all the bees wait upon her, and obey her. Then there are the drones—lazy fellows, who lounge all their time away. And then there are the working-bees, like this one here, and they do all the work for everybody. How Uncle Collins would laugh at them, if he knew!"

"Doesn't Uncle Collins know about bees?"

"No, I think not. It was the gardener who told me. And, besides, I think Uncle Collins would never

have done talking about them and quizzing them, if he once knew they couldn't do without a queen. I heard him say yesterday, that kings and queens were against nature, for that nature never makes one man a king and another man a cobbler, but makes them all alike; and so he says, kings and queens are very unjust things."

"Bees have not the sense to know anything about that," observed the little Girl, softly.

"Of course not! Only fancy how angry these working fellows would be, if they knew what the gardener told me?"

"What was that?"

"Why, that the working-bees are just the same as the queen when they are first born; just exactly the same; and that it is only the food that is given them, and the shape of the house they live in, that make the difference. The bee-nurses manage that; they give some one sort of food, and some another, and they make the cells different shapes; and so some turn out queens, and the rest working-bees. It's just what Uncle Collins says about kings and cobblers—nature makes them all alike. But, look! the dinner is over; we must go."

"Wait till I let the Bee out, Brother," said the little Girl, taking him gently up in a soft handkerchief; and then she looked at him kindly, and said, "Poor fellow! so you might have been a queen if they had only given you the right food, and put you into a right-shaped house! What a shame they didn't! As it is, my good friend," (and here her voice took a childish mocking tone)—"as it is, my good friend, you must go and drudge away all your life long, making honey and wax. Well, get along with you! Good luck to your labours!" And with these words she fluttered her handkerchief through the open window, and the Bee found himself once more floating in the air.

Oh, what a fine evening it was! But the liberated

Bee did not think so. The sun still shone beautifully, though lower in the sky, and though the light was softer, and the shadows were longer; and as to the flowers, they were more fragrant than ever: yet the poor Bee felt as if there were a dark heavy cloud over the sky; but in reality the cloud was over his own heart, for he had become discontented and ambitious, and he rebelled against the authority under which he had been born.

At last he reached his home—the hive which he had left with such a happy heart in the morning—and, after dashing in, in a hurried and angry manner, he began to unload the bags under his thighs of their precious contents; and as he did so he exclaimed, "I am the most wretched of creatures!"

"What is the matter? what have you done?" cried an old relation who was at work near him; "have you been eating the poisonous kalmia flowers, or have you discovered that the mischievous honey-moth has laid her eggs in our combs?"

"Oh, neither, neither!" answered the Bee, impatiently; "only I have travelled a long way, and have heard a great deal about myself that I never knew before, and I know now that we are a set of wretched creatures!"

"And, pray, what wise animal has been persuading you of that, against your own experience?" asked the old Relation.

"I have learnt *a truth*," answered the Bee, in an indignant tone, "and it matters not who taught it me."

"Certainly not; but it matters very much that you should not fancy yourself wretched merely because some foolish creature has told you you are so; you know very well that you never *were* wretched till you were told you were so. I call that very silly; but I shall say no more to you." And the old Relation turned himself round to his work, singing very pleasantly all the time.

But the Traveller-bee would not be laughed out of his wretchedness: so he collected some of his young companions around him, and told them what he had heard in the large dining-room of the country house; and all were astonished, and most of them vexed. Then he grew so much pleased at finding himself able to create such excitement and interest, that he became sillier every minute, and made a long speech on the injustice of there being such things as queens, and talked of nature making them all equal and alike, with an energy that would have delighted Uncle Collins himself.

When the Bee had finished his speech, there was first a silence and then a few buzzes of anger, and then a murmured expression of plans and wishes. It must be admitted, their ideas of how to remedy the evil now for the first time suggested to them, were very confused. Some wished Uncle Collins could come and manage all the beehives in the country, for they were sure he would let *all* the bees be queens, and then what a jolly time they would have! And when the old Relation popped his head round the corner of the cell he was building, just to inquire, "What would be the fun of being queens, if there were no working-bees to wait on one?" the little coterie of rebels buzzed very loud, and told him he was a fool; for, of course, Uncle Collins would take care that the tyrant who had so long been queen, and the royal children, now ripening in their nurse-cells, should be made to wait on them while they lasted.

"And when they are finished?" persisted the old Relation, with a laugh.

"Buzz, buzz," was the answer; and the old Relation held his tongue.

Then another Bee suggested that it would, after all, be very awkward for them all to be queens; for who would make the honey and wax, and build the honey-combs, and nurse the children? Would it not be best,

therefore, that there should be no queens whatever, but that they should all be working-bees?

But then the tiresome old Relation popped his head round the corner again, and said, he did not quite see how that change would benefit them, for were they not all working-bees already?—on which an indignant buzz was poured into his ear, and he retreated again to his work.

It was well that night at last came on, and the time arrived when the labours of the day were over, and sleep and silence must reign in the hive. With the dawn of the morning, however, the troubled thoughts unluckily returned, and the Traveller-bee and his companions kept occasionally clustering together in little groups, to talk over their wrongs and a remedy. Meantime, the rest of the hive were too busy to pay much attention to them, and so their idleness was not detected. But, at last, a few hot-headed youngsters grew so violent in their different opinions, that they lost all self-control, and a noisy quarrel would have broken out, but that the Traveller-bee flew to them, and suggested that, as they were grown up now, and could not all be turned into queens, they had best sally forth and try the republican experiment of all being working-bees without any queen whatever. With so charming an idea in view, he easily persuaded them to leave the hive; and a very nice swarm they looked as they emerged into the open air, and dispersed about the garden to enjoy the early breeze. But a swarm of bees, without a queen to lead them, proved only a helpless crowd, after all. The first thing they attempted, when they had re-collected to consult, was to fix on the sort of place in which they should settle for a home.

"A garden, of course," says one. "A field," says another. "There is nothing like a hollow tree," remarked a third. "The roof of a good outhouse is best protected from wet," thought a fourth. "The branch

of a tree leaves us most at liberty," cried a fifth. "I won't give up to anybody," shouted all.

They were in a prosperous way to settle, were they not?

"I am very angry with you," cried the Traveller-bee, at last; "half the morning is gone already, and here we are, as unsettled as when we left the hive!"

"One would think you were going to be queen over us, to hear you talk," exclaimed the disputants. "If we choose to spend our time in quarrelling, what is that to you? Go and do as you please, yourself!"

And he did; for he was ashamed and unhappy; and he flew to the further extremity of the garden to hide his vexation; where, seeing a clump of beautiful jonquils, he dived at once into a flower to soothe himself by honey-gathering. Oh, how he enjoyed it! He loved the flowers and the honey-gathering more than ever, and began his accustomed murmur of delight, and had serious thoughts of going back at once to the hive as usual, when, as he was coming out of one of the golden cups, he met his old Relation coming out of another.

"Who would have thought to find you here alone?" said the old Relation. "Where are your companions?"

"I scarcely know; I left them outside the garden."

"What are they doing?"

". . . Quarrelling . . ." murmured the Traveller-bee.

"What about?"

"What they are to do."

"What a pleasant occupation for bees on a sunshiny morning!" said the old Relation, with a sly expression.

"Don't laugh at me, but tell me what to do," said the puzzled Traveller. "What Uncle Collins says about nature, and our all being alike, sounds very true, and yet somehow we do nothing but quarrel when we try to be all alike and equal."

"How old are you?" asked the old Relation.

"Seven days," answered the Traveller, in all the sauciness of youth and strength.

"And how old am I?"

"Many months, I am afraid."

"You are right, I am an oldish bee. Now, my dear friend, let us fight!"

"Not for the world. I am the stronger, and should hurt you."

"I wonder what makes you ask advice of a creature so much weaker than yourself."

"Oh, what can your weakness have to do with your wisdom, my good old Relation? I consult you because I know you are wise; and I am humbled myself, and feel that I am foolish."

"Old and young—strong and weak—wise and foolish—what has become of our being alike and equal? But never mind, we can manage. Now let us agree to live together."

"With all my heart. But where shall we live?"

"Tell me first which of us is to decide, if we differ in opinion?"

"*You* shall, for you are wise."

"Good! And who shall collect honey for food?"

"*I* will; for I am strong."

"Very well; and now you have made me a queen, and yourself a working-bee! Ah! you foolish fellow, won't the old home and the old queen do? Don't you see that if even *two* people live together, there must be a head to lead and hands to follow? How much more in the case of a multitude!"

Gay was the song of the Traveller-bee as he wheeled over the flowers, joyously assenting to the truth of what he heard.

"Now to my companions," he cried at last. And the two flew away together, and sought the knot of discontented youngsters outside the garden wall.

They were still quarrelling, but no energy was left

them. They were hungry and confused, and many had already flown away to work and go home as usual.

And very soon afterwards a cluster of happy, buzzing bees, headed by the old Relation and the Traveller, were seen returning with wax-laden thighs to their hive.

As they were going to enter, they were stopped by one of the little sentinels who watch the doorway.

"Wait," cried he; "a royal corpse is passing out!"

And so it was;—a dead queen soon appeared in sight, dragged along by working-bees on each side; who, having borne her to the edge of the hive-stand, threw her over for interment.

"How is this? what has happened?" asked the Traveller-bee in a tone of deep anxiety and emotion: "surely our queen is not dead?"

"Oh, no!" answered the sentinel; "but there has been some accidental confusion in the hive this morning. Some of the cell-keepers were unluckily absent, and a young queen-bee burst through her cell which ought to have been blocked up for a few days longer. Of course the two queens fought till one was dead; and, of course, the weaker one was killed. We shall not be able to send off a swarm quite so soon as usual this year; but these accidents can't be helped."

"But this one might have been helped," thought the Traveller-bee to himself, as with a pang of remorse he remembered that he had been the cause of the mischievous confusion.

"You see," buzzed the old Relation, nudging up against him,—"you see even *queens are not equal!* and that there can be but one ruler at once!"

And the Traveller-bee murmured a heart-wrung "Yes."

—And thus the instincts of nature confirm the reasoning conclusions of man.

III.

DAILY BREAD.

"Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."—MATTHEW vi. 32.

"I WISH your cheerfulness were a little better timed, my friend," remarked a Tortoise, who for many years had inhabited the garden of a suburban villa, to a Robin Redbreast, who was trilling a merry note from a thorn-tree in the shrubbery. "What in the world are you singing about at this time of year, when I and everybody else of any sense are trying to go to sleep, and forget ourselves?"

"I beg your pardon, I am sure," replied the Robin; "I did not know it would have disturbed you."

"You must be gifted with very small powers of observation then, my friend," rejoined the Tortoise. "Here have I been grubbing my head under the leaves and sticks half the morning, to make myself a comfortable hole to take a nap in; and always, just as I am dropping off, you set up one of your senseless pipes."

"You are not over-troubled with politeness, good sir, I think," observed the Robin; "to call my performance by such an offensive name, and to find fault with me for want of observation, is the most unreasonable thing in the world. This is the first season I have lived in the garden, and neither in the spring nor in the few musical months of summer have you ever objected to my singing. How was I to know you would dislike it now?"

"Your own sense might have told you as much, without my giving myself the trouble of explanation," persisted the Tortoise. "Of course, it's natural enough,

and not disagreeable, to hear you little birds singing round the place, when there is something to sing about. It rather raises one's spirits than otherwise. For instance, when the weather becomes mild in the early year, and the plants begin to grow and get juicy, and it is about time for me to get up from my winter's sleep, I have no objection to be awakened by your voices. But now, in this miserable season, when the fruits and flowers are gone, and when even the leaves that are left are tough and dry, and there is not a dandelion that I care to eat; and when it gets colder and colder, and damper and damper every day, this affectation of merriment on your part is both ridiculous and hypocritical. It is impossible that you can feel happy yourself, and you have no business to pretend to it."

"But, begging your pardon once more, good sir; I do feel happy, whatever you may think to the contrary," answered the Robin.

"What, do you mean to say that you *like* cold, and damp, and bare trees, with scarcely a berry upon them?"

"I like warm sunny days the best, perhaps," replied the Robin, "if I am obliged to think about it and make comparisons. But why should I do so? I am quite comfortable as it is. If there is not so much variety of food as there has been, there is, at any rate, enough for every day, and everybody knows that enough is as good as a feast. For my part, I don't see how I can help being contented."

"Contented! what a dull idea, to be just contented! I am contented myself, after a fashion; but you are trying to seem happy, and that is a very different sort of thing."

"Well, but happy; I am happy, too," insisted the Robin.

"That must be then because you know nothing of what is coming," suggested the Tortoise. "As yet, while the open weather lasts, you can pick up your favourite worms, and satisfy your appetite. But, when the ground has become so hard that the worms cannot

come through, or your beak get at them, what will you do?"

"Are you sure that will ever happen?" inquired the Robin.

"Oh! certainly, in the course of the winter, at some time or another; and, indeed, it may happen any day now, which makes me anxious to be asleep and out of the way."

"Oh, well, if it happens now, I shall not mind a bit," cried the Robin; "there are plenty of berries left!"

"But supposing it should happen when all the berries are gone?" said the Tortoise, actually teased at not being able to frighten the Robin out of his singing propensities.

"Nay, but if it comes to *supposing*," exclaimed the Robin, "I shall suppose it won't, and so I shall be happy still."

"But I say it *may* happen," shouted the Tortoise.

"And I ask *will* it?" rejoined the Robin, in quite as determined a manner.

"Which you know I cannot answer," retorted the Tortoise again. "Nobody knows exactly either about the weather or the berries beforehand."

"Then let nobody trouble themselves beforehand," persisted the Robin. "If there was anything to be done to prevent or provide, it would be different. But as it is, we have nothing to do but to be happy in the comfort each day brings." Here the Robin trilled out a few of his favourite notes, but the Tortoise soon interrupted him.

"Allow other people to be happy, then, as well as yourself, and cease squalling out of that tree. I could have forgiven you, had the branches been full of haws; but, as they are all withered or eaten, you can have no particular excuse for singing in that particular bush, rather than elsewhere; so let me request you at once to go."

"Of course I will do so," answered the Robin, politely. "It is the same thing to me exactly: so I wish you a good morning, and, if you desire it, a refreshing sleep."

So saying, the Robin flew from the thorn-tree to another part of the grounds, where he could amuse himself without interruption; and the Tortoise began to hustle under the leaves and rubbish again, with a view to taking his nap.

But, by-and-by, as the morning wore away, the frosty feeling and autumnal mists cleared off; and when the sun came out, which it did for three or four hours in the early afternoon, the day became really fine.

The old Tortoise did not fail to discover the fact, and not having yet scratched himself a hole completely to his mind, he came out of the shrubbery and took a turn in the sunshine.

"This is quite a surprise, indeed," said he to himself. "It is very pleasant, but I am afraid it will not last. The more's the pity; but, however, I shall not go to bed just yet."

With these words, he waddled slowly along to the kitchen garden, where he was in the habit of occasionally basking under the brick wall; and now, tilting himself up sideways against it, he passed an hour, much to his satisfaction, in exposing his horny coat to the rays of the sun; a feat which he never dared to perform during the heats of summer.

Meanwhile, the poor little Robin continued his songs in a retired corner of the grounds, where no one objected to his cheerful notes. A tiny grove it was, with a grassy circle in the middle of it, where a pretty fountain played night and day.

During the pauses of his music, and especially after the sun came out, he wondered much to himself about all the strange uncomfortable things the Tortoise had said. Oh, to think of his having wanted to go to

sleep and be out of the way; and now here was the sunshine making all the grove as warm as spring itself! If he had not been afraid the Tortoise might consider him intrusive, he would have gone back and told him how warm and pleasant it was; but absolutely he durst not.

Still, he could not, on reflection, shut his eyes to the fact, that there were no other songsters in the grove just then beside himself, and he wondered what was the reason. Time was, when the Nightingale was to be heard every night in this very spot; but, now he came to think of it, that beautiful pipe of his had ceased for months; and where the bird himself was, nobody seemed to know.

The Robin became thoughtful, and perhaps a little uneasy.

There was the Blackbird, too;—what was he about that he also was silent? Was it possible that all the world was really, as the Tortoise said, thinking it wise to go to sleep and be out of the way?

The Robin got almost alarmed. So much so, that he flew about, until he met with a Blackbird, whom he might question on the subject, and of him he made the inquiry, why he had left off singing?

The Blackbird glanced at him with astonishment.

"Who *does* sing in the dismal autumn and winter?" said he. "Really, I know of scarcely any who are bold and thoughtless enough to do so, except yourself. The Larks may, to be sure, but they lead such strange lives in the sky, or in seclusion, that they are no rule for anyone else. Your own persevering chirruping is (in my humble judgment) so out of character with a season in which every wise creature must be apprehensive for the future, that I can only excuse it on the ground of an ignorance and levity which you have had no opportunity of correcting."

"It would be kinder to attribute it to a cheerful contentment with whatever comes to pass," cried the

Robin, ruffling his feathers as he spoke. "I rejoice in each day's blessing as it comes, and never wish for more than does come. *You*, who are wishing the present to be better than it is, and fearing that the future may be worse, are meanwhile losing all enjoyment of the hour that now is. You think this wise. To me it seems as foolish as it is ungrateful!"

With these words the Robin flew away as fast as he could, for, to say the truth, he felt conscious of having been a little impertinent in his last remark. He was rather a young bird to be setting other people right; but a Robin is always a bold fellow, and has, moreover, rather a hot temper of his own, though he is a kind creature at the bottom. He had been insulted too, there was no doubt; but when people feel themselves in the right, what need is there of ruffling feathers and being saucy?

And the Robin did honestly feel himself in the right; but, oh! how hard it is to resist the influence of evil suggestions, even when one knows them to be such, and turns aside from them. They are so apt to steal back into the heart unawares, and undermine the principle that seemed so steady before. To a certain extent, this was the case with our poor little friend; and those who are disposed to judge harshly of his weakness, must remember that he was very young, and could not be expected to go on right always without a mistake.

Certain it is, that he drooped awhile in spirits, as the winter advanced. He sang every day, it is true, and would still have maintained his own opinions against anyone who should have opposed them; but he was decidedly disturbed in mind, and thought sadly too much, for his own peace and comfort, of what both the Tortoise and Blackbird had said.

The colder the days became, the more he became depressed; not that there was any cold then that he really cared about, but he was fidgeting about the much

greater cold which he had been told was coming; and, as he hopped about on the grass round the fountain, picking up worms and food, he was ready to drop a tear out of his bright black eye at the thought of the days when the ground was to be so hard that the worms could not come out, or his beak reach them.

Had this state of things gone on long, the Robin would have begun to wish to go to sleep, like the Tortoise; and no more singing would have been heard in the plantation of the suburban villa that year.

But Robins are brave-hearted little fellows, as well as bold and saucy; and one bright day our friend bethought himself that he would go and talk the matter over with an old Woodlark, who he had heard frequented a thicket at a considerable distance off.

On his way thither, he heard several larks singing high up in the sky over the fields; and by the time he reached the thicket he was in excellent spirits himself, and seemed to have left all his megrims behind.

It was fortunate such was the case, for when, as he approached the thicket, he heard the Woodlark's note, it was so plaintive and low, that it would have made anybody cry to listen to it. And when the Robin congratulated him on his singing, the Woodlark did not seem to care much for the compliment, but confided to his new acquaintance, that although he thought it right to sing and be thankful, as long as there was a bit of comfort left, he was not so happy as he seemed to be, since in reality he was always expecting to die some day of having nothing at all to eat.

"For," said he, "when the snow is on the ground, it is a perfect chance if one finds a morsel of food all day long."

"But I thought you had lived here several seasons," suggested the Robin, who in his braced condition of mind was getting quite reasonable again.

"So I have," murmured the Woodlark, heaving his breast with a touching sigh.

"And you did not die of having nothing to eat, last winter?" observed the Robin.

"It appears not," ejaculated the Woodlark, as gravely as possible, and with another sigh; whereat the Robin's eye actually twinkled with mirth, for he had a good deal of fun in his composition, and could not but smile to himself at the Woodlark's solemn way of admitting that he was alive.

"Nor the winter before?" asked he.

"No," murmured the Woodlark again.

"Nor the winter before that?" persisted the saucy Robin.

"Well, no; of course not," answered the Woodlark, somewhat impatiently, "because I am here, as you see."

"Then how did you manage when the snow came, and there was no food?" inquired the Robin.

"I never told you there was actually *no* food in those other winters," answered the Woodlark, somewhat peevishly, for he did not want to be disturbed in his views. "Little bits of things did accidentally turn up always. But that is no proof that it will ever happen again. It was merely chance!"

"Ah, my venerable friend," cried the Robin; "have you no confidence in the kind chance that has befriended you so often before?"

"I can never be sure that it will do so again," murmured the Woodlark, despondingly.

"But when that kind chance brings you one comfortable day after another, why should you sadden them all by these fears for by-and-by?"

"It is a weakness, I believe," responded the Woodlark. "I will see what I can do towards enjoying myself more. You are very wise, little Robin; and it is a wisdom that will keep you happy all the year round."

Here the Woodlark rose into the air, and performed several circling flights, singing vigorously all the

time. The old melancholy pervaded the tone, but that might be mere habit. The song was, at any rate, more earnest and strong.

"That is better already," cried the Robin, gaily; "and for my part, if I am ever disposed to be dull myself, I shall think of what you told me just now of all the past winters; namely, that *little bits of things did always accidentally turn up.* What a comforting fact!"

"To think of my ever having been able to comfort anybody!" exclaimed the Woodlark. "I must try to take comfort myself."

"Ay, indeed," cried the Robin, earnestly; "it is faithless work to give advice which you will not follow yourself."

So saying, the Robin trilled out a pleasant farewell, and returned to the shrubbery-grounds, where, in an ivy-covered wall, he had found for himself a snug little winter's home.

It was during the ensuing week, and while the Robin was in his blithest mood, and singing away undisturbed by megrims of any kind, but rejoicing in the comforts of each day as it came, that the Tortoise once more accosted him.

When Robin first heard his voice he was startled, and feared another scolding, but he was quite mistaken. The old Tortoise was sitting by the side of an opening in the ground, which he had scratched out very cleverly with his claws. It was in a corner among some stones which had lain there for years; and one large one in particular overhung the entrance of the hole he had dug. The wind had drifted a vast quantity of leaves in that direction, and some of them had been blown even into the hole itself, so that it looked like a warm underground bed.

"Hop down to me, little bird," was the Tortoise's address, in a quite friendly voice; an order with which the Robin at once complied "Ah, you need not be

afraid," continued he, as the Robin alighted by his side. "I am quite happy now. See what a comfortable place I have made myself here in the earth. There, there, put your head in and peep. Did you ever see anything so snug in your life?"

The Robin peered in with his sharp little eye, and really admired the Tortoise's ingenious labour very much.

"Hop in," cried the Tortoise gaily; "there's room enough and to spare, is there not?"

Robin hopped in, and looked round. He was surprised at the size and convenience of the place, and admitted that a more roomy and comfortable winter's bed could not be wished for.

"Who wouldn't go to sleep?" cried the Tortoise; "what say you, my little friend? But you need not say; I see it in your eye. You are not for sleep yourself. Well, well, we have all our different ways of life, and yours is a pleasant folly, after all, when it doesn't disturb other people. And you won't disturb me any more this year, for I have made my arrangements at last, and shall soon be so sound asleep, that I shall hear no more of your singing for the present. It's a nice bed, eh? isn't it? Not so nice, perhaps, as the warm sands of my native land; but the ground, even here, is much warmer inside than people think, who know nothing of it, but the cold damp surface. Ah, if it wasn't, how would the snowdrop and crocus live through the winter? Well, I called you here to say good-bye, and show you where I am, and to ask you to remember me in the Spring; if—that is, of course—you survive the terrible weather that is coming. You don't mind my having been somewhat cross the other day, do you? I am apt to get testy now and then, and you disturbed me in my nap, which nobody can bear. But you will forgive and forget, won't you, little bird?"

The kind-hearted Robin protested his affectionate feeling in a thousand pretty ways.

"Then you won't forget me in the Spring," added the Tortoise; "but come here and sit on the laurel-bush, and sing me awake. Not till the days are mild, and the plants get juicy, of course, but as soon as you please then. And now, good-bye. There's a strange feeling in the air to-day, and before many hours are over there will be snow and frost. Yours is a pleasant folly. I wish it may not cost you dear. Good-bye."

Hereupon the old Tortoise huddled away into the interior of his hole, where he actually disappeared from sight; and as, soon afterwards, the drifting leaves completely choked up the entrance of the place, no one could have suspected what was there, but those who knew the secret beforehand. He had been right in his prognostication of the weather. A thick, gloomy, raw evening was succeeded by a bitterly cold night, and towards the morning the over-weighted clouds began to discharge themselves of some of their snow; and as the day wore, the flakes got heavier and heavier; and as no sunshine came out to melt them, and a biting frost set in, the country was soon covered with a winding-sheet of white. And now, indeed, began a severe trial of the Robin's patience and hope. It is easy to boast while the sun still shines, if ever so little; but it is not till the storm comes that the mettle of principle is known.

"There are berries left yet," said he, with cheerful composure, as he went out to seek for food, and found a holly-tree by the little gate of the plantation, red with its beautiful fruit. And, after he had eaten, he poured out a song of joy and thankfulness into the cold wintry sky, and finally retreated under his ivy-bush at night, happy and contented as before.

But that terrible storm lasted for weeks without intermission; or, if it did intermit, it was but to a partial thaw, which the night of frost soon bound up again, as firmly as, or more firmly than, ever.

Many other birds besides himself came to the holly-

tree for berries, and it was wonderful how they disappeared, first from one branch, and then from another: but still the Robin sang on. He poured out his little song of thanks after every meal. That was his rule. Other birds would jeer at him sometimes, but he could not be much moved by jeers. He had brought his bravery, and his patience, and his hope into the field against whatever troubles might arise, and a few foolish jests would not trouble a spirit so strung up to cheerful endurance.

"I will sing the old Tortoise awake yet," said he, many and many a time, when, after chanting his little thanksgiving in the holly-tree, he would hover about the spot where his friend lay asleep in the ground, and think of the Spring that would one day come, bringing its mild days and its juicy plants, and its thousand pleasant delights.

I do not say but that it was a great trial to our friend, when, after dreaming all these things in his day-dreams, he was roused up at last by feeling himself unusually cold and stiff; and was forced to hurry to his ivy home to recover himself at all.

The alternations, too, of winter, are very trying. The long storm of many weeks ceased at last, and a fortnight of open weather ensued, which, although wet and cold, gave much more liberty to the birds, and allowed of greater plenty of food. The Robin could now hop once more on the grass round the fountain, and get at a few worms, and pick up a few seeds. And he was so delighted with the change, that he half hoped the winter was over; and he sat in the laurel-tree by the Tortoise's cave, and poured out long ditties of anticipative delight. But the bitterest storm of all was yet in store,—the storm of disappointed hope.

Oh, heavy clouds, why did you hang so darkly over the earth just before the Christmas season? Oh, why did the fields become so white again, and the trees so laden with snow-wreaths, and the waters so frozen and

immoveable, just when all human beings wanted to rejoice and be glad? Did you come—perhaps you did!—to rouse to tender pity and compassionate love the hearts of all who wished to welcome their Saviour with hosannas of joy? but who cannot forget, if they read the gospel of love, that whosoever does a kindness to one of the least of His disciples, does it unto Him. Surely, thus may the bitter cold, and the trying weather of a biting, snowy Christmas, be read. Surely, it calls aloud to every one, that *now* is the moment for clothing the naked, for feeding the hungry, and for comforting the afflicted.

Heavily, heavily, heavily, it came down. There were two days in which the Robin never left his ivy-covered hole, but hunger took him at last to the holly-tree by the little gate. Its prickly leaves were loaded with snow, and on one side the stem could not be seen at all. Was it his fancy, or was the tree really much less than before? He hopped from one white branch to another, and fancied that large pieces were gone. He peered under and over, picked at the leaves, and shook down little morsels of snow; but nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, could a single berry be found!

The Robin flew about in distress, and in so doing caught sight of a heap of holly, laurel, and bay branches that were laid aside together to be carried up to the house to decorate its walls. He picked two or three of the berries from them as they lay there,—ripe, red berries, such as he had gathered but lately from the tree; and then came the gardener by, who carried the whole away. He flew after the man as he walked, and never left him until he disappeared with his load into the house. Its unfriendly doors closed against the little wanderer, and no one within knew of the wistful eyes which had watched the coveted food out of sight.

"I have eaten; let me be thankful," was the

Robin's resolute remark, as he flew away from the house and returned to the holly-tree, which had so lately been his storehouse of hope, and from its now stripped and barren branches poured out, as before, his lay of glad thanksgiving for what he had had.

Not a breath of wind was blowing, not a leaf stirred; not a movement of any kind took place, save when some overloaded branch dropped part of its weight of snow on the ground below; as the sweet carol of the still hungry little bird rose through the air on that dark, still, winter's afternoon.

What did it tell of? Oh, surely, that clear bell-like melody, that musical tone, that exquisite harmonious trill, told of something,—of something, I mean, besides the tale of a poor little desolate bird, whose food had been snatched away before his eyes, and who might be thought to have eaten his last meal.

Surely, those solitary notes of joy, poured into the midst of a gloom so profound, were as an angel's message, coming with a promise of peace and hope, at a moment when both seemed dead and departed.

Homeward from his day's work of business, there passed by, at that moment, the owner and inhabitant of the little suburban villa. It had been a melancholy day to him, for it was saddened by painful recollections. It was the anniversary of the day on which his wife had been laid in her churchyard grave, and since that event two sons had sailed for the far-off land of promise, which puts a hemisphere between the loved and loving on earth. So that far-distant land held them, whilst one—not so distant, perhaps, but more unattainable for the present—held the other. No wonder, therefore, that on that owner's face, as he approached his home, there hung a cloud of suffering and care, which not even the thought of the Christmas-day at hand, and the children yet spared to his hearth, could prevent or dispel.

Verily the autumn of man's life comes down upon him as the autumn season descends upon the earth. Clouds and tears mixed with whatever brightness may remain.

All at once, however, the abstracted look of sorrow is startled. What is it that he hears? He is passing outside the little plantation which skirts the grounds. He is close to the little gate near which the holly-tree grows. He pauses,—he stops,—he lifts up those troubled eyes. Surely, a wholesome tear is stealing over the cheek. Beautiful, tender, affecting, as the voice of the cuckoo in spring, there swept over the listener's heart the autumnal song of the Robin. Sing on, sing on, from the top of your desolate tree, oh little bird of cheerfulness and hope! Pour out again that heaven-taught music of contentment with the hour that now is. Shalt *thou* be confident of protection, and *man* destitute of hope? Shalt *thou*, in the depth of thy winter's trial, have joy and peace, and *man* never look beyond the cloud?

Poor little innocent bird, he sang his pretty song to an end, and then he flew away. Quarrel not with him if, in painful recollection of the holly-berries that had been carried into the house, he hovered round its windows and doors, with anxious and curious stealth. Whether across the middle of one window he observed a tempting red cluster hanging down inside, no one can say. But the tantalizing pain of such a sight, if he felt it, was soon over, for just then the window was opened, and along its outside ledge something was strewn by a careful hand. The window was closed again immediately, and whoever it was within retreated backwards into the room.

From a standard rose-bush, whither he had flown when the window was opened, our little friend watched the affair.

Presently a fragrant odour seemed to steal towards him,—something unknown yet pleasant, something

tempting and very nice. Was there any risk to be feared? All seemed quiet and still. Should he venture? Ah, that odour again! it was irresistible.

In another minute he was on the ledge, and boldly, as if a dozen invitations had bidden him welcome to the feast, he was devouring crumb after crumb of the scattered bread.

A burst of delighted laughter from within broke upon his elysium of joy for a moment, and sent him back with sudden flight to the rose-bush. But no disaster ensued, and he was tempted again and again.

The children within might well laugh at the saucy bird, whom their father had, by his gift of bread-crumbs, tempted to the place. They laughed at the bold hop,—the eager pecking,—the brilliant bead-like eye of their new guest,—and at the bright red of his breast; but it was a laugh that told of nothing but kind delight.

"Little bits of things do accidentally turn up always, indeed!" said the Robin to himself, as he crept into his ivy hole that evening to sleep; and he dreamt half the night of the wonderful place and the princely fare. And next morning, long before anybody was awake and up, he was off to the magical window-ledge again, but neither children nor bread-crumbs were there:—(how was he to know without experience about breakfast hours, and the customs of social life?) So it almost seemed to him as if his evening's meal had been a dream, too good a thing to be true, or if it had ever been true, too good to return. Yet a sweeter song was never heard under a summer sun, than that with which the Robin greeted that early day, the Christmas morning of the year.

Perched in the laurel-bush near the Tortoise's retreat, he told his sleeping friend a long, marvellous tale of his yesterday's adventures, and promised him more news against the time when he should return to wake him up in the spring.

Nor did he promise in vain; for whether the Tortoise would be patient enough to listen or not, there was no doubt the Robin had soon plenty to tell. He had to tell, not only of the meal that was spread for him in due time that very Christmas-day, by those suddenly raised up friends—but of the daily meal that henceforth never failed; of the curious tiny house that was erected for him at the end of the ledge, which, carpeted as it was with cotton wool and hay, formed almost *too* warm a roosting-place for his hardy little frame.

But even to the Tortoise he could never tell all he had felt during that wonderful winter; for he could never explain to any one the mysterious friendship which grew up between himself and his protectors. He could never describe properly the friendly faces that sat round the breakfast-table on which at last he was allowed to hop about at will.

He told, however, how he used to sing on the rose-tree outside, every morning of every day, to welcome the waking of his friends, and how, in the late afternoons, the father would sometimes open the window, and sit there alone by himself, listening to his song.

"Come, come, my little friend," remarked the Tortoise, when he did awake at last, and had come out of his cavern-bed, and heard the account; "I have been asleep for a long time, and I daresay have been dreaming all manner of fine things myself, if I could but think of them. Now, I suspect you have had a nap, as well. However, I am very glad to see you alive, and not so half-starved looking as I expected. But as to your having sung every day, and had plenty to eat every day, and been so happy all the time,—take my advice, don't try to cram older heads than your own with travellers' tales!"

it never meant to ripen at all, the boldest and most hopeful became uneasy, and the Master of the Harvest despaired.

But his wife had risen no more from her bed, where she lay in sickness and suffering, yet in patient trust; watching the sky through the window that faced her pillow; looking for the relief that came at last. For even at the eleventh hour, when hope seemed almost over, and men had half learned to submit to their expected trial, the dark days began to be varied by a few hours of sunshine; and though these passed away, and the gloom and rain returned again, yet they also passed away in their turn, and the sun shone out once more.

And the poor sick wife, as she watched, said to those around her that the weather was gradually changing, and that all would come right at last; and sighing a prayer that it might be so with herself also, she had her Bible brought to the bed, and wrote in the fly-leaf the text, "Some thirty, some sixty, some an hundredfold;" and after the text the date of the day, for on that day the sun had been shining steadily for many hours. And after the date the words, "Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required; yet if Thou, Lord, be extreme to mark iniquity, O Lord, who may stand?"

And day by day the hours of sunshine were more in number, and the hours of rain and darkness fewer, and by degrees the green corn-ears ripened into yellow, and the yellow turned into gold, and the harvest was ready, and the labourers not wanting. And the bursting corn broke out into songs of rejoicing, and cried, "At least we have not waited and watched in vain! Surely goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life, and we are crowned with glory and honour. Where is the Master of the Harvest, that he may claim his own with joy?"

But the Master of the Harvest was bending over the bed of his dying wife.

And she whispered that her Bible should be brought. And he brought it; and she said, "Open it at the fly-leaf at the end, and write, 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.'" And she bade him add the date of the day, and after the date of the day the words, "O Lord, in Thy mercy say of me—She hath done what she could!" And then she laid her hand in his, and so fell asleep in hope.

And the harvest of the earth was gathered into barns, and the gathering-day of rejoicing was over, and the Master of it all sat alone by his fireside, and his wife's Bible on his knee. And he read the texts, and the dates, and the prayers, from the first day when the corn-seeds were held back by drought; and as he read, a new heart seemed to burst out within him from the old one—a heart which the Lord of the other harvest was making soft, and the springing whereof He would bless.

And henceforth, in his going out and coming in from watching the fruits of the earth, the texts, and the dates, and the prayers were ever present in his mind, often rising to his lips; and he murmured and complained no more, let the seasons be what they would, and his fears however great; for the thought of the late-sprung seed in his own dry cold heart, and of the long-suffering of Him who was Lord and Master of all, was with him night and day. And more and more as he prayed for help, that the weary struggle might be blessed, and the new-born watching and waiting not be in vain; so more and more there came over his spirit a yearning for that other harvest, where he, and she who had gone before, might be gathered in together.

And thus,—in one hope of their calling,—the long-divided hearts were united at last.

V.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

"Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it."—PSALM cxxvii. 1.

"WHAT more could have been done for it than I have done?" The cry came from an afflicted heart.

It was uttered by Hans Jansen, the Hamburgh printer's only son, as he sat moaning over a dying rose-tree in the corner of a little back-yard behind his father's house.

Hans Jansen was what is commonly called *not all there;* that is, he could not see and comprehend the things of this life as his neighbours did. More than half of what passed round him was hidden from his eyes. He was in part, though not altogether, an idiot.

It was a great distress to his parents that this should be the case—it had been so once, however. But, being good Christians, they had reconciled themselves to it, and learned, by degrees, to see comfort through the cloud. If Hans was below the rest of the world in some ways, he was above them in others. The fear of God and the love of his neighbour had come to him almost as an instinct; at any rate without the struggles some people have to go through, before their hearts are touched by either one or the other. He wouldn't have missed saying his prayers night and morning, or grace at meals, to please an emperor; and an unkind word about anyone could never be got out of him. Truly their Hans was ripening for a better state of existence, whether he had any book learning or not. He had nothing to fear, but everything to hope for, from death.

And he had one passion—one special cause of enjoy ment and delight. He doated on flowers, and was seldom seen without one in his button-hole all the summer through. But this was because his good-nature had made him many friends, who took a pleasure in seeing him pleased, and gave him a nosegay when they could. It was very well known that he had no garden of his own.

Mr. Jansen's house was a red brick one, in a row, with a square enclosure in front, covered with pebbles, and a square yard at the back, which had a pump in the middle, and a dog-kennel on one side. It is true this yard was covered with soil, and there were scrubby patches of grass upon it here and there; but it was used for a drying-ground, and had never once been brightened by flowers since the day it was first parcelled out and the walls were built round it, across which were now stretched the lines on which the linen was hung to dry.

The fact was, Mr. Jansen had not wished for a garden. He was busy from morning to night at his printing business in the town; his wife had quite enough on her hands in household cares; and no effectual work could be expected from an idiot child.

How Hans came to be so fond of flowers was a mystery; but there are many mysteries of this sort in the world. It had been so from his baby-days, and many were the hours he had spent, unnoticed, in a corner of that back-yard, grubbing in the old black soil, "making believe" to have a garden with beds and walks like those he had seen elsewhere. Nay, once or twice he had tried to grow mustard and cress, and even sweet-peas, a few seeds of which were given him by a neighbour's child; but, somehow or other, nothing ever came of these real attempts, and he had to make himself happy with the make-believe garden at the end.

But it was no make-believe plant he was wailing over now, but a real Géant de Batailles rose-tree, which had

been given him many weeks before. It was thus :—A good-natured nursery gardener, who knew his father, had let him walk through his grounds one flower-show day, before the company came; and having, by chance, noticed poor Hans sobbing from excitement at sight of the glories round him, his own heart melted; for he had an only and very clever son himself, and he felt sorry for the darkness over his friend's child. So when Hans was going away, he gave him, not only a nosegay of the tulips and hyacinths, but a fine young rose-tree in a pot; "as fine a Géant de Batailles as had ever been raised," said he to Hans, as he offered it; adding that it would flower in six or eight weeks, and brighten up all the place by its rich blaze of colour.

Hans trembled as he received it, and he stood with his mouth half open, irresolute and abashed, wanting to speak, yet not daring.

"What is it, boy?" asked the nursery gardener. "Speak out."

"How do you make your flowers so beautiful?" gasped Hans, half afraid of what he had said.

"Well, well," returned the nursery gardener, with a smile, "some in one way, and some in another; but we don't tell our secrets to everybody. Nevertheless, I'll tell you how to make your rose beautiful, for you'll make no bad use of anything, I'll be bound. You've a yard, or a court, or some place with soil in it, eh?"

"Yes, yes," cried Hans.

"Then I'll tell you what you must do," pursued the nursery gardener. "Dig a hole in a sheltered place, pretty deep, you know, and put in a bone or two, and some hair (my son shall give you a handful) at the bottom. Then turn the plant out of the pot, not disturbing the ball of earth for the world, remember; and set it right down upon the hair. Then fill up the hole neatly with soil, and say nothing about what you've done to anybody, and there's an end. Keep it sheltered, mind, and water it at first, or if you see it get very dry;

and with soap-suds whenever you can get them. Soap-suds and bones and hair are the main things. There's nothing like them for bringing roses to perfection. You'll have flowers as big as a hat, and as bright as cherries, before the summer's over, if you do as I say, and look well after the plant. There! good luck to you and it! Good-bye."

And this was the plant—this, poor wizened thing—over which Hans was moaning. But how had it come to this? That was the difficulty. The gardener's son had given Hans the hair, and he had found the bones,—there were plenty by the dog-kennel; and he had dug the hole and put them at the bottom; and he had turned the plant out of the pot, and not broken the ball of earth; and he had placed it upon the hair, and filled up the hole; and watered it at first, and whenever he saw it get very dry, and with soap-suds on a wash-day; for he had only to ask and have, without question or trouble. He had done everything, in short—surely everything! For he had put it in the most sheltered spot he could find—in the self-same corner where he had played at make-believe gardens as a child; and it had seemed as if an old dream were suddenly come true. And as to looking well after it,—could a miser have watched his gold with more jealous care? And no one had interfered; for he had told nobody, partly from some indefinite idea that the nursery gardener had ordered him not; partly because he thought it would be so nice to surprise his mother, some day before the summer was over, by the rich blaze of colour that was to brighten all the place.

The very maid who hung out the clothes in the yard didn't know of it; for, to keep the secret from her, and make the shelter of the tree more complete, he had set up boards across the corner where it was planted, from wall to wall, and no one could see what was there. They looked upon the boards as some idle freak of the idiot mind.

It was the buds that failed first; those buds which ought to have swollen and grown larger day by day. Even his eye, sharpened now by anxious care, could detect that they rather dwindled than increased in size; and, observing this more and more as time went on, he one day summoned courage to walk to the Nursery Gardens, and tell his fears to the giver of the plant.

But he, when he found that all he ordered had been done, only smiled.

"I tell you again," said he, "and from long experience, there's nothing like bones and hair for bringing roses to perfection. You can't go wrong with them. Give it a little more water or soap-suds. You've perhaps a light soil in your place. Give it more water. The buds will swell fast enough, I'll be bound. Indeed, I fancy you're watching it so closely, you can't see true. It's easy enough to do that, I can tell you. The buds are grown, I suspect, though you don't think so. Leave it to itself. Don't fancy anything wrong. It's sure to be right with bones and soap-suds and hair. They're the finest rose-manure in the world."

Hans listened with his mouth open, nodded his head, with a "Thank you!" at the end, and went away, hoping he had not "seen true." And he did not take the boards down nearly so often afterwards, lest his watching too closely should do harm. But every time he did take them down, he grew more and more unhappy. The healthy green of the leaves was no longer to be seen; as for the buds, they shrivelled gradually more and more. Growth anywhere there was none. Inch by inch the plant was dying—or Hans thought so, and he rubbed his eyes for further light in vain. And one day, when the last leaves which remained had crinkled up and turned brown, he sat down on the ground, and wailed, as I have said:

"What more could I have done for it than I have done?"

The dream of a dream, come true at last, was over.

The make-believe garden was still the only one he had ever enjoyed. He must go back to it again.

He replaced the boards, for he shrank from the very sight of the dying plant, and sat down on the ground again, though he scarcely knew why.

But presently there was a barking of the dog, and an opening of the door, and a shouting of "Hans!" by his mother. The nursery gardener was passing that way, and had called to admire the roses he expected to see. Hans could not speak, but led the way to the corner of the yard, and, when they were there, he pointed to the boards before he took them down, and exclaimed, trying to smile through his tears:

"I couldn't have sheltered it more, could I? It has never been scorched, or chilled, or blown upon, even. It has had bones, and hair, and water, and all you ordered, and I've looked well after it; and yet it's dead, I know!"

As he spoke, Hans lifted down the boards, and exposed the withered tree.

The nursery gardener stared at it, and then at Hans, in genuine amazement.

"You don't mean to say you've kept it *so* all the time?" cried he. "Why, what have you been thinking about, man? How could you expect it to live? Why, it has had no light!"

"You said nothing about that," replied Hans, his face distorted with bewilderment and grief. "You said you made roses beautiful with bones, and hair, and soap-suds, and that I should make mine beautiful with them too."

"But not without sunshine," shouted the nursery gardener, quite excited at the idea of such a mistake.

Hans made no answer. He could not utter another word. He sat down on the ground again and hid his face in his hands.

"I must have spoken like a fool," exclaimed the nursery gardener, half to himself. "But who'd have

thought of anybody fancying a plant could get on without light? Well, perhaps I ought to have thought though," added he, as his eye fell on poor Hans' doubled-up figure. Then, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder, it came into his heart to try and explain matters.

"Look up, Hans," said he. "It's not your fault at all—it's mine. There was something I forgot to tell you. I spoke like a fool when I talked of making roses beautiful with manure and things like that, as if they could do it themselves. I didn't mean that. It is God who makes the roses, you know, and He makes them so that they can't do without the light He chooses them to live in, and that's the light from heaven—do you see?"

Here the nursery gardener paused to consider how he must go on, and Hans shuffled a bit, and then looked up at his friend. And his friend saw the light from heaven streaming on that sad, half intelligent face, with the red eyes straining upwards for comprehension; and he proceeded.

"So they can't do without God's light, let you give them what manure you will. They're only helps, Hans, such things as those.

"A man may help or hinder what God intends, by good or bad management, it's true; but that's all, and that's all I meant. Bones, and hair, and soap-suds are the finest rose manure in the world, that's true too, and it's a great secret; but they're all nothing—nothing, lad!—without God's secret—the light from heaven. Do you see what I mean, Hans?"

"I'm trying," said Hans.

"Hans," continued the nursery gardener, "it has been my fault, not yours; and you shall have another rose-tree, or we'll save this one yet, for if there's a bit of life left in it, God's light may bring it round. But tell me, now. You are a very good lad, you know, at times—indeed, I fancy always; but no matter, we'll call it at times. What makes you ever good?"

Hans' catechism had been short, but sound; and he answered at once, "God's grace."

"Now that's just it!" shouted the nursery gardener, in delight. "That's just what I meant. And all the schooling, and teaching, and trying in the world won't do without God's grace, will they, Hans?"

Hans nodded his negative assent.

"No, they're only manures and helps," pursued the nursery gardener, "and very good things, no doubt, the same as bones, and hair, and soap-suds for roses, and there's nobody can dispute about *them*. But all the helps in the world can do nothing without the main thing God chooses them to thrive by, and that's God's grace for a man, and God's light for a plant; and what one is for one, that the other is for the other, and it's my opinion it's the light of Heaven for both."

If Hans did not quite follow the thread of the nursery gardener's argument, he must be excused. The nursery gardener understood what he meant himself, and that was something; and Hans added to his small stock of observations the useful truth he had bought so dearly, viz. that plants cannot live without light.

Those who are interested further in his fate will be glad to hear that the nursery gardener soon after turned one side of the old printer's back-yard into a garden, at his own expense, and gave Hans such plants and help, that both mother and son had a few bright flowers of their own the next year to delight their eyes.

But more than this. The poor lad proved so watchful and attentive; so obedient, too, to advice in his own small matters; and the rational occupation to an end seemed so evidently to clear a something from the confusion of his mind, that it struck the nursery gardener one day to trust him with some little employment on his more important premises. And the experiment was not unsuccessful. On the one subject of flowers Hans became not only trustworthy but intelligent.

And so it came to pass, that it was in the nursery garden, among the flowers—his only idea of an earthly paradise—that the poor idiot ended his days. There, guileless as the beautiful creatures which surrounded him, and trustful as the Highest Wisdom could have made him, he lived; and thence did the spirit, so long pent in an imperfect earthly tabernacle, return to the great Lord of life and light and intelligence, without whom "nothing is strong, nothing is holy."

VI.

THE GENERAL THAW.

"Ah! when shall all men's good
Be each man's rule, and universal Peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land."
TENNYSON.

ICE, Snow, and Water,—only think of such neighbours—blood relations, so to speak, from the creation—squabbling about their rights and dignities, and which was best of the three; instead of living pleasantly together, giving and taking in turn, as the case might be.

But so it was, and the facts were these. It was a very very hard winter that year, and the Ice on the mill-dam grew so thick and strong, and was, besides, so remarkably smooth and fine, that it forgot its origin, and fancied itself a crystal floor.

Only think what nonsense! But there is no nonsense people will not be ready to believe, when they once begin to meditate upon their own perfections.

And so, fancying himself a crystal floor, the Ice got to look down upon the Water which flowed underneath him as an impertinent intruder; and considered it a

piece of great familiarity, on the part of the Snow, to come dropping upon him from the sky.

In fact, his head was so full of his own importance in the world, that it seemed to him that everybody else ought to be full of it too, and keep at a respectful distance, and admire him. And he made some very unpleasant remarks to this effect.

For instance: "I should be much obliged to you,' observed he one day to the Water which ran into the dam from the stream, "if you would have the goodness to turn yourself in some other direction, when you find yourself coming near me. Over the fields to the right hand, or to the left; or into the ditches, if you please; anywhere, in fact, but just under me. You fidget me to death with your everlasting trickling and movement. Pray amuse yourself in some other way than by disturbing people in such a position as mine. I daresay you have no notion of how disagreeable you make yourself to others: you are so used to your own ways, yourself. But the truth is, I can bear it no longer, and you must carry your restlessness somewhere else—it distracts my attention from my friends!"

Now the "friends" he spoke of were the skaters and sliders, who did nothing but praise his beauty as they darted along on his surface, making beautiful figures as they went.

"But *I* wish," answered the Water, as it kept running in, "that you would not talk nonsense, but leave me a little more elbow-room, instead of pressing so close upon me that I get thinner and thinner every day. If you don't, I shall certainly break out if I can and be at the top myself. I've no notion of being kept down by my neighbours, however grand and polished they may be. Just take care of yourself, and look out. If the springs on the moors should get loose, and the streams fill and come in here with a rush, I should lift you up like nothing, and silly enough you would look. Turn in another direction,

indeed!—into the ditches if I please—many thanks for the pleasant suggestion—and all to accommodate you! Why, I should as soon think of sinking into the ground, and I hope I know my own level better than that! Meantime I give you notice. If you won't be obliging yourself, you must expect no favour from me, and it will be good-bye to your beauty and grandeur if I can only squeeze through!"

"*If!*" shouted the Ice, in a mocking tone.

"If? well, if!" echoed the Water in a rage. "Stiff and strong as you are, it only wants a thaw in the hills to send a torrent your way, and the whole thing's done. But what do you know about thaws, and hills, and torrents, and the force of pent-up water, fixed in one place as you are, and never getting any information?——

"Now if you were to ask my advice——who know so much more than you do——and could give you a hint or two——upon yielding gracefully to necessity ——it would be greatly to your advantage—— But——"

But the *but* died away, and was lost; for, even while the Water was talking, some of it was freezing; and as it froze, its voice got thinner and thinner, till at last it could not be heard at all.

Meantime, the Ice got thicker and thicker, and more conceited every minute. And said he, "It cannot be worth my while to trouble myself with what is happening underneath me! There the Water is, and there he must remain, let him brag and chatter as he will! he at the bottom, and I at the top. As to making out what he means by his long talk, that's hopeless. He stuck fast in the middle of the story himself. I wish he would get out of the way; but as he won't—well, —there he must stay, I suppose—he at the bottom, and I at the top. He's all in a muddle, with his *ifs* and his threats. But one cannot expect firmness of mind from anything so restless as he is. It needs

some solidity of character to maintain one's position in life. Rolling stones gather no moss. *I* sit firm. And here come my friends to do me honour, I declare!"

And come they did; and in such quantities, that the mill-dam Ice had never felt half so grand before.

It was really the prettiest sight in the world! Here, were beautiful ladies in chairs, pushed along from behind by gay young men. There, other young men were skating or sliding; sometimes shooting by like stars, sometimes stooping to hit balls, which flew half across the large expanse of ice by the effort of one blow; sometimes cutting figures, which the eye could scarcely follow, so rapid and brilliant were the movements. While, in a separate corner, children were sliding and shouting, tumbling down, laughing, and getting up again, as happy as any of the others.

Really the Ice, on whom this pretty scene took place, must be excused for feeling a little vain. It seemed to him as if it was all done in compliment to himself; for, you see, he had never been at school to learn any better, and find out how insignificant everybody is to his neighbour.—"That I should be treated with such honour and distinction! that I should be the supporter of such a brilliant assembly! that I should be necessary to the happiness of such crowds!" Such were the Ice's reflections from time to time, as his friends continued their sports. Talk he could not, for he was lost in a rapture of delight; and he felt that, as life could have nothing more to give, he wished it might last on this way for ever. Poor Ice! He thought only of himself! As to the trickling of the Water underneath him, it fidgeted him no longer. "What can I or my friends care for such trifles?" was his consolatory reflection.

So it trickled away unattended to, and presently the day closed in, and the company went away home. And then, as night drew on, the wind veered to the south, and a drizzle of snow began to fall. It was very light

at first—mere snow-dust, in fact, and in the darkness the Ice knew nothing of what was happening, for feel it he could not. But by degrees the drizzle turned into flakes, which dropped with graceful delay through the air, and said to themselves as they did so, "How we *shall* be admired by the world when it awakes! It isn't every day in the year it's so beautifully drest. It's only now and then it has visitors from the skies. Do let us cover it well over, so that it may find itself white altogether for once!"

Which they did; and when the morning came, not a bit of the mill-dam Ice was to be seen. Indeed, he might have gone on all day fancying it was night (for everything was dark to him, as he lay underneath in the shade of the snow-fall), but that one or two luckless urchins, who wanted to slide, came and kicked some of it away with their feet.

And then he found out the truth. There he was, covered up with a great white sheet, and couldn't see out! His beauty, his friends, his glories, where were they now? He thought of yesterday, and his heart almost broke! Oh! who had dared to send these miserable Snow-flakes to disfigure him thus? Never was insolence like this! The trickling of the water below was a trifle, a mere nothing by comparison.

The Snow-flakes were amazed. "We come of ourselves, nobody sent us," murmured they, as they still kept falling gently from the sky, and dropping like eider-down on the ice; "and we have the right to come where we please. Who can hinder us, I wonder! The clouds are too heavy to carry us all, so some of us come down. My sisters and I were nearest, so here we are. We don't understand your rudeness. You ought to be flattered that we choose to come,—we who are used to be carried about by the breezes, and live in the clouds! But such a reception as this, why, it hurts the feelings, of course!"

"*The feelings!*" shouted the Ice, half ready to

crack with vexation; "you to talk of feelings, who have flung yourselves uninvited on my face; beggarly wanderers as you are, without house or home; and have spoilt my beauty and happiness at once!——"

He couldn't go on; the words stuck fast as he tried.

"Beggarly wanderers!" echoed the Snow-flakes, almost losing their temper as they repeated the words: "now see what comes of being low-born, and envious, and vile. See what it is to live in the dirty hole of an earthly world! You don't know the good when it comes to you, you dreary, motionless lump of ignorant matter! Beggarly wanderers, indeed! This to us, who are carried about by the breezes, and live in the clouds of the sky! Dear us! Who would lower themselves to your level by choice? And beauty,—you talk of beauty, as if we could find any here but what we bring ourselves. Fancy the beauty of dingy, dirty stuff like this earth of yours! But, of course, you know no better; and what is worse, you won't learn when you might. Oh dear, what it is to be low-born, and envious, and vile! Oh dear, what it is to belong to the winds and the skies, and to find oneself in an alien land!"

"If the winds and the skies are so fond of you, let them come and take you away," cried the Ice. "I ask only one thing—Begone! Begone with your mincing conceit and your beauty, you are not worthy that I should hold you up."

"You braggart! we should like to hide you and cover you over for ever," muttered the Snow-flakes. "And we don't intend to go, for your pleasure and whim. Here we are, and here we shall stay, let you squall and bawl as you will. We at the top, and you at the bottom; and there you may remain!"

And such seemed likely to be the case; but by and by, when all the clouds had passed over, and no more snow was falling, and the sun had begun to shine, a

party of skaters and sliders came and stood on the bank of the dam.

And said they one to another,—first, "What a pity!" and then, "But the snow is not very thick;" and then, "It surely might be shovelled away if we had but two or three men with shovels and brooms." So they sent for two or three men with shovels and brooms, and these swept and shovelled, and shovelled and swept, till a great space of the ice was left clear, and the snow was laid in heaps on the sides.

It was a very hard case for the Snow! Such a poor, soft, delicate thing to be so ill-used,—it was really cruel work! Pushed, and flung, and dirtied, and shovelled about till she was ready to melt with self-pity.

But there is no helping one's fate, so she lay along the sides of the mill-dam, grumbling and groaning—the only satisfaction she could get.

"So inhospitable to visitors anyhow," cried she; "and so stupid to visitors like us! But this comes of leaving one's station to mix with things below. And to soil my lovely colour with their hateful besoms and brooms! And to squeeze me, and throw me about with their odious shovels, as if I was dirt! Ah! we who belong to the sky should never come near the earth, that's very clear. People here don't know what it is to be delicate and refined. Oh mercy! what comes next? . . ."

She might well exclaim. The party of sliding boys had quarrelled,—a sort of fun-quarrel among themselves. So there was just now a rush to the side of the dam, a seizing and pommelling, and squeezing of snow into lumps by a dozen active little hands; and then the balls were let fly in every direction; and some hit necks, and others faces, and others jackets, and others caps: and all got messed and broken, and thrown about. There is no knowing when the fight would have ended, if the skaters had not interfered.

The scattered, begrimed morsels could not utter a single word. But the Ice talked fast enough. "Now

you have got your deserts," cried he, gaily. "Now you see what it is to come and boast over your betters. Oh, you're too delicate and refined for earth, are you? Well, then keep in the sky. Nobody wants you here—I told you that before. See, now, you have to sit in a corner, and watch how the world admires me! You wanted to hide me for ever, did you, you poor soft, foolish thing! But my friends knew better than that, and now you've got your deserts. I shall have you all in order one of these days. You and the Water below, with his fidgety spite. What a droll idea it is! Why, you *both* want to be at the top, if—poor dears!—you only could. And you can't see—poor blind things!—that *I'm* the only one fit to stand alone!"

"We will soon see to that," growled the Water from below, and surely rather louder than usual. "I feel what I feel, and you'll feel it presently too. If I can't stand alone, I can bide my time. We *both* want to be at the top, do you say? And who are *both* if you please? Are you classing me, with my strength, and that flimsy Snow, together? What a judge you must be!"

"As if strength was the only merit!" murmured what still remained of flaky Snow on the ice. "What a coarse, earthy notion! But it's just what one might expect; they're all alike down here, Water and Ice and all; no fit companions for us; but we've found that out too late. We lowered ourselves to come down,—the more's the pity, I'm sure!"

Were there ever three creatures so silly as the Water, the Snow, and the Ice? I dare not answer No.

Well, before the day was over, the skaters had asked each other, as they passed and repassed, "Was there not a softness on the ice?"—"Was not the snow less crisp?" But all was perfectly safe, so people did not stop to talk then: only, as they went home, they agreed that a thaw was coming.

Which remark, the Ice, not hearing, knew nothing about. So he never suspected why the Water under-

neath was more fussy than ever, but thought it was all out of spite to himself; so he raved and scolded away; boasting that his friends should one day help him to get rid of *it*, as they had done just now of the Snow. "It's a great thing to have powerful friends!" cried he, triumphantly.

But the Water gurgled and giggled, and made no answer.

The truth was, that one or two springs in the hills had got loose from a few hours' thaw; and a strong stream, though not a torrent, was pouring into the dam. And presently there was a cry for room.

"More room! more room! make much more room! You stiff-necked Ice, do you hear?"

And now the contest began—"I shall not give way an inch, you noisy vagabond Water!"

—"If you don't, I shall wash you away."

—"You shall wash the world away first. *I* shall maintain my position."

—"We shall see about that in a minute."

And so they went on, while the Snow-heaps whimpered at the sides, "What a coarse-minded couple they are! What it is to be low-born and vile! *We* are quite unfit to be here!"

Meantime, the Water poured in, and kept swelling more and more; till at last there was a heaving upward —in spite of all he could do—of the crystal floor; and by and by a sharp crack rang along its surface, from one end to the other.

He could not maintain his position after all!

And now came another, and another, and these were along the sides, as the lift-up came; and at one corner in oozed the Water itself. It had no chance of bragging, however; for as fast as it touched the surface it froze, and was turned to Ice.

So this was all the Water could do then, for the thaw in the hills had stopped. But the Ice never rallied again, because of those horrible cracks. He was laughed at on every side—he, who had boasted so

much! For the Water below and the Snow above, who were ready enough to tease each other at other times, were willing to join together now in spiting a common foe. Such is the way of the world!

And when a real general thaw came in the air, and all over the country, as it soon did, and the sliders and skaters withdrew—oh dear, those were dismal days for the poor deserted Ice!—"My friends forsake me," cried he, "and my foes rejoice! Those cracks have broken my heart! I believe it is melting away."

And it was; but the Snow-flakes were the first to disappear, and then the ice became wet outside. And said he, "The Water has squeezed through, I declare! This comes of keeping bad company; but, anyhow, the Snow-flakes are gone, and that's civil at least. *They* did what they were asked, and that's something."

Now the Water had not squeezed through, and the Snow-flakes had not been civil; but the cleverest people make mistakes sometimes.

And presently the Water below found the pressure upon him not quite so great. There was a little more room to move in. So said he, "Dear me! this is good. My friend the Ice is giving way. 'Better late than never,' we'll say. He's coming to reason at last."

But the Ice was not coming to reason—he was only melting away. And as he got thinner and thinner, he struggled less and less with the Water; and said he, "We shall all live to be friends and neighbours at last, I believe."

But they lived to be far more than that, for one day they found themselves brothers! For when the ice got so thin that the water poured over the sides, it broke into a thousand fragments, and went rolling and tumbling about, dissolving away every minute.

And the snow-heaps which had stuck on the sides fell in too, and they all rolled about together, Ice and Snow and Water in one. And they wept and rolled and tumbled, and tumbled and rolled and wept; and

cried they, "What have we been doing? What folly have we been talking? Scolding, and thwarting, and boasting, when, my friends—my dear, dear friends—we are all of us brothers together!"

It was a long and happy embrace: it is going on still! But, oh! what a pity they did not find the truth out sooner! Let those who are brothers by nature think of this, and not wait for *The General Thaw*—Death.

VII.

KICKING.

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."—1 SAM. xv. 23.

THREE years of complete liberty, and then to have to learn in three short weeks to submit entirely to the will of other people!

This sounds a hard plan of education, and perhaps is not the very best one possible. Still, thousands of young colts have turned into good horses upon it; and if there is to be a reform, it must come from above, not from below. Reforms from below savour of rebellion, and that is sure to lead to a reaction the wrong way again.

Yet people ought not to blind themselves—those above, I mean, any more than those below. Every man, therefore, ought to sit from time to time in his neighbour's chair, and look with his neighbour's eyes, from his neighbour's position, at what he himself is about. It is wonderful how much wiser, as well as kinder, people grow if they do this.

And among a man's neighbours he should not be ashamed to reckon the creatures he collects round him for his own convenience and amusement, and calls his "domestic animals." Why "domestic," but that he has taken them from their own natural homes, and

brought them to his? And if so, surely it is not too much to ask that he should give them, each in his degree, the comforts of a home citizenship, in return for the duties he exacts. If he does this honestly, a few errors of judgment on his part will not matter more than a few errors of conduct on theirs; for imperfection has not only to be struggled against, but borne, in this world.

Sitting in neighbour Firefly, the spirited young chestnut colt's chair, then, it is but fair to own that he may well have felt it queer, after three years' luxury of doing as he liked in large grassy pastures, to find himself suddenly cooped up in a small square stuffy place, ceiled in instead of open to the air, and surrounded by walls, to one particular part of which he was fastened by a horrible contrivance that went round his head and neck, and gave him a most unpleasant pull whenever he tried to get away. But yesterday he was free as the wind, so far as the hedges extended—could gallop from one to the other while his breath lasted; might snort at the passengers in the road which skirted the field as much as he pleased; throw out his legs at everything and everybody; kick, plunge, bound, jump till he was tired; whinny at his companions, whether he had anything worth saying or not; and all this at will: while now—but the contrast is too painful to dwell upon, for Firefly was now in a horse-breaker's stable, with a halter round his neck.

He had one consolation, however, and it is not a small one to most people—indeed it ought always to be a matter of thankfulness to all—he was extremely well fed. It is true, the very delicious grain he had now been chumping, at three separate meals to his heart's content, with his nose bent over the manger, had been very dearly purchased by the loss of his freedom the morning before. The wild driving he had undergone from the field to the stable yard, with the treacherous capture at the end, still rankled in his mind; and the

cruel outrage to his young heart's nervous shyness, when hands of violent men overcame him, and the fatal noose was slipped over his head, was not to be forgotten. Still taste is taste; the food remained delicious all the same, and he was so young, he could enjoy the present, irrespective of the past or future.

But all feeds of corn come to an end at last; and at the end of the first he began to fidget, after the second he grew angrily impatient, and when he had swallowed the third, he became what is called (archaically) *rampageous*, for in point of fact the good corn had begun to warm his blood. It was very high living compared to the cold grass he had been used to.

Now, as was natural, one of the first things he did was to call out for his old companions of the field, and this he did, in colt's fashion, of course; but what colt's fashion really is will not be known till men become good linguists, and have learnt other languages besides those of their own race. At present they are miserably backward in that branch of learning, and have no idea even of what flies talk about, though they hear them murmuring away in the air as soon as they themselves awake every summer morning, and for nearly all day after.

Well, in colt's fashion Firefly shouted for his companions, and after two or three attempts, each of them louder than the one before, must have made himself heard; for at last he was answered, though from what seemed a great distance, so smothered were the sounds. But this was only because they came through stone walls. In point of fact, his young friends, Whitefoot and Silverstar by name, were very near—namely, in the very next adjoining stable—both of them captives like himself; both of them with halters round their necks, one in one stall, one in another.

Conversation was difficult under such circumstances, and could not be carried on long. What they did say, when they discovered they were near each other, amounted to about this:—

"So you are somewhere hereabouts, too, Whitefoot and Silverstar. Why don't you come where I am? Where are you?"

"We don't know where we are. Where are you? Why don't you come to us?"

"Because something twitches my head if I try to move away; so I can't."

"That's just what happens to us; so we can't."

"It's abominable!"

"It's very distressing."

"I wonder what it means! I am very angry."

"We wonder too; but it can't be helped."

Here the dialogue ended, for the colts were not the only inhabitants of the two stables. In the one, with Whitefoot and Silverstar, was a good-tempered, middle-aged, Welsh pony, known all over the country-side as good old Taffy. In the other, with Firefly, was an old, half-bred white Arabian mare, whose mother had been brought from the East.

Old people who talk to young ones should think of the young ones more than of themselves. If they want to gossip and grumble, and let off vexed feelings, let them do it to each other. Life is very trying sometimes as age comes on, and those of the same age can understand the feelings of the age, and make allowance for the groanings of the natural man. But young creatures may easily be led away by a few sad or passionate words, into believing all sorts of nonsense. I say, then, let old people unburden their personal feelings to each other, but never talk anything but useful sense, or pleasant nonsense, to a child.

Had the old white mare in the stable thought of this, it would have been better for Firefly—perhaps, at least, he would not have had the same encouragement to turn out unmanageable which she now gave him. For no sooner had he uttered the words, "I wonder what it means! I am very angry," to his companions next door, than she shook her own halter till the rattle

roused his attention, and then observed, in a tone of melancholy which was of itself quite impressive: "*I* can tell you what it means, but I am afraid when you know you will not be less angry than now, but rather more."

Firefly's quick blood ran quicker at the startling announcement.

"Oh, dear, what makes you say so? Who can you be?" cried he in excitement.

"One who ought to know something, if age and experience can instruct," answered the sorrowful old mare, adding, in a lower tone still, "or if unusual opportunities in early life have not been lost upon her."

"I am almost afraid of hearing, yet suspense is intolerable," cried Firefly. "Where am I? What is going to happen?"

"You are a prisoner, at the mercy of those who shut you up," answered the old mare, to whose monotonous existence the power of lashing a young colt up to indignation was rather an amusing novelty. "It is the first time this has happened to you, I suppose?"

"It is the first time I was ever made fast in this way," groaned Firefly. "If I was ever in an enclosure before, it was loose by my mother's side. My memory is confused so far back."

"I, too, had a mother once," murmured the old mare, Egeria; and her grief in thinking how long ago made her pause.

"Tell me about her," exclaimed Firefly; "what became of her? I want to know."

"What a tone you speak in!" answered Egeria. "You want to know! You forget you are a prisoner, and must learn to want nothing but what is given you."

"I shall never learn that," cried he; "and why am I a prisoner? tell me that."

"Because the people you belong to want to make you useful—useful to *them*, that is."

"And why must I be useful to them? Why may I not please myself, as I have done before? What are *they* to me?"

"Ask *them*," said Egeria coldly. "They will tell you—masters, superiors."

"You provoke me," cried Firefly, stamping into the straw at his feet. "Tell me why I am here, as you promised? My former history is short enough, as you shall hear. I——"

"Spare yourself the trouble," interrupted Egeria; "our histories in this country are all alike. We are left to ourselves for nearly three years, and are taught nothing; then our superiors get hold of us, by fright and force, and in three weeks make us learn everything they want."

"And then?" gasped Firefly.

"And then it depends upon the people into whose hands one falls, whether one is well or ill used."

"And you have borne all this in patience?" asked Firefly.

"I had no heart to act otherwise," sighed Egeria. "I felt no spirit to resist."

"But I feel plenty of spirit, and *shall* resist," cried the young chestnut, straining against the halter as hard as he could bear, and dashing his legs against the sides of the stall, first on one side, then on the other.

"But what can you do?" whined Egeria, a little startled by his violence.

"Do?" shouted Firefly; "why, I shall kick, kick, kick!" And each time he uttered the word he struck out against the wooden partition between the stalls. Egeria began to be alarmed.

"I do not advise it," she said; "I assure you it will do no good. You had better bear it all as well as you can."

"Oh, that is all very well for those who can receive it, old lady," exclaimed Firefly: "I can't. I can't stand injustice; and, what's more, I won't. Why, my blood

is boiling already. Only to think of the way they drove us along before they got us here. Of course, if I had known, I should never have left the field. And the still worse fright those men gave me when they all laid hold of me and threw this horrible thing over my head! It's all treachery and injustice from beginning to end."

"Ah! if we were but in my mother's country!" sighed Egeria.

"Why, what then?" inquired Firefly.

"Oh, my poor young friend, I'm afraid it will do more harm than good to tell you," said Egeria; "yet, if you wish it so very much, I hardly know how to refuse."

The old goose, to consent to tell what she felt might do harm! But she was vain of knowing more than other people on the subject, which she really did. Besides which, she wanted to stop Firefly's kicking and plunging, by holding his attention. So said she—

"The people there—in the East, I mean—treat young colts quite differently from the people here. As soon as ever they can leave their mothers, they are brought among the tents where the men, women, and children live, and the women take care of them, and feed them, and pet them. So they get used to their masters from the first, and there is not the fright and horror and startling change to go through which we suffer so much from at the end of our first three years; and so the halter, and teaching, and all that sort of thing, come much easier—though, of course, restraint is restraint everywhere. But, for pity's sake, don't begin to kick again," concluded Egeria, interrupting herself at the sound of renewed struggles on Firefly's part. "I have been telling you my mother's story to keep you quiet."

"Quiet!" shouted the miserable colt. "I won't be quiet, to please anybody. How can I be quiet, when I want to get away from this savage country, and go to

that other one—that East you talk of—where colts are properly managed?"

"But, my dear young friend, consider—it's too late," expostulated Egeria. "You can't begin life over again. You really mustn't let your feelings run away with you in this foolish way. People here don't mean badly, altogether. They are tolerably kind, on the whole; at least, some of them are. They feed you well, as you see; and after you have learnt what they teach, you will be glad, though you won't like it while it is going on."

"Then it shan't go on!" shouted Firefly. "They shan't teach me! I won't learn! I won't have their food, or their kindness! If they had brought me up properly, I could have submitted as well as anybody; but they have been unjust, and now I won't. I'll do something—I'll go to the East; and if I can't go to the East, I'll kick!"

"Oh, hush!—do, pray, hush!" said Egeria, who, to do her justice, had merely wanted to excite a sympathetic grumble, not to rouse a storm. "You go much too far, I assure you."

"*You* say that, because you have no spirit, you poor old creature!" exclaimed Firefly. "You know you haven't—you said so yourself, just now; but that's no rule for me."

"If I have not much spirit," remarked Egeria, "I may have some sense, and I want you to have some too. You can't get away, to begin with—so the East is out of the question; and you cannot resist these people to any purpose—so, take my advice, submit and have done with it. I can tell you, from long experience, that kicking is never of any use."

"Then I shall go on kicking, out of spite *because* it's of no use," cried Firefly; and as he announced this grand resolution, he broke out all over into a profuse sweat from excitement.

At which moment the stable-door opened, and the horse-breaker stepped in, just to have a look at the

colt; and after doing so, and observing his irritable and uneasy condition, said he to himself, "I shall have a good deal of trouble with *this* one, I'm afraid."

Now, in saying this, he was making a sort of comparison between Firefly and the other two; for he had just been in the next stable, and seen Whitefoot and Silverstar unusually placid and quiet—for fresh-caught colts, that is to say; nobody expects from a kitten the gravity of a cat. But what wonder? Besides that they were greys, and therefore easier-tempered by nature than was to be expected from a chestnut (for in horses, colour and disposition are apt to go together), they had been hearing nothing but good advice ever since they were shut up—and, what is more, they had actually been attending to it!

But, then, good old Taffy gave his good old advice in such a very pleasant way. "My dear friends," cried he, when he heard them plunging about in their stalls at first, "I do feel so sorry for you—so sorry, very sorry—because I know so well what you suffer. Just the same was done with me when I was your age."

"Oh, how did you bear it?" asked the colts.

"Well, well, I was very impatient just at the beginning," answered Taffy; "for my Welsh blood made me chafe at the confinement, and I was alone, and had nobody to explain the meaning of it all to me, so it was hard work; and this makes me particularly glad to be here just now to help you. I can tell you a great deal that will comfort you, and plenty more that will surprise and amuse you very much. There are two sides to everything, even to things that vex one, I assure you. But quiet!—quiet! dear friends, I do beg," continued he, as he heard more plunging and shaking of halters, "or I shall not be able to say another word."

"We will be quiet," cried the colts, for they liked the idea of being surprised and amused—as who does not?

Then Taffy told them they were not brought here to be teased to death, as they had perhaps supposed, but to prepare them for being taught a thousand nice things which they would never be able to do if they were not taught, and which it was immensely jolly to be able to do, when the teaching was once over; and he proceeded to hold forth on the pleasures of trotting, cantering, and galloping over the country, with a good feed of corn, a comfortable stable, and a valet to rub one down at the end; as also the delightful excitements of racing and hunting, which even he had enjoyed, though only as a looker-on; but he added, that they couldn't have a share in all this, without first learning to obey their masters, and love them a little bit too.

Whereupon both colts shuddered all over, for their horror of the men who had shut them up was very great, and love seemed utterly impossible.

"Ah! you can't bear the thought of this, I see," cried Taffy. "Well, of course, if it could be, one would like to have no master but oneself—eh, my friends?"

To which both Whitefoot and Silverstar agreed with a whinny of satisfaction.

"But what is the use of fretting oneself, by wishing for what can't be?" pursued Taffy. "These men and women are, though I don't know how, or why, our masters and superiors, and I know from my own experience that we are happiest when we submit to their wishes with a good grace; when we struggle and resist we are miserable."

"But suppose they wish something cruel and unjust?" sighed Silverstar.

"But who is to decide what is so?" asked Taffy, in return. "Many things seem so that are not; your being here against your will, for instance—you will be so glad about it by and by, when the teaching is finished."

"It is comfortable to hear that," murmured Silverstar.

"Is the teaching itself very unpleasant?" asked Whitefoot.

"*Very*," cried Taffy at once, at the mere recollection of it, and the colts shuddered again. "But here I am," he continued, "none the worse, and all the better, and as happy as possible, with a man or woman, or a little child on my back three or four times a week, and a pet with all the family. Oh! you have no notion how good-natured these men very often are—bringing one tit-bits both in the stable and field—bread, or apples, or carrots, or clover, which one takes out of their hands. But for pity's sake don't begin kicking again," cried he, as he heard them flinging wildly about, at the notion of men coming so near. "Why, you surely wouldn't kick at kindness? You must meet it half-way, when it's offered, you foolish fellows, or you may live to want it before you die! But, don't alarm yourselves! You won't be able to be on these intimate terms with masters and superiors, till you've learnt to be well-mannered and obedient. But my experience tells me they are kind when we are good; and where they seem otherwise, I try to believe it is because we don't understand the meaning of what they are doing;—with superiors one can't expect that one should."

A word spoken in season, how good is it! The colts grew calmer and calmer as Taffy went on, and when, in conclusion, he told them a story about a good-natured lady, who used to bring him handfuls of oats in reward of a pretty trick he learnt of opening the stable-door with his nose, they half began to believe that these men and women were not, after all, such dreadful creatures as they had supposed.

And as it was just then that the horsebreaker entered the stable to look at them, it is not to be wondered at that they bore his presence with only about half the horror they would otherwise have felt, and so kept tolerably quiet.

And thus a week went on, Taffy encouraging them, by his own example and experience, to bear what was coming with patience and in hope.

And he could but speak from his own experience, poor Taffy! Let us trust, then, that in these "days of advance" there are fewer and fewer exceptions to the rule, that a docile horse makes a kind master. Shame on the master if it does not!

It was at the end of the first week that the real trial began for all three colts; and a trial indeed it was! They have hard hearts who would deny it. Those heavy iron bits forced into the young, tender mouths; so stiff against their teeth, so cold against their flesh, how horrible they were! And the bridles that pulled at them, forcing the poor heads to turn hither and thither for mere whim's sake, as it seemed (for whatever reason there was for it, *they* could not find it out)—what a cruel contrivance! Then the long whips, which kept them at one distance all the time, so that, as they were forced to move on continually, they had no choice but to go round and round in a circle for ever—how irritating! My heart bleeds when I think of it, and imagine the two long hours of struggle on that first dreadful day. How severe the trial must have been to them—must ever be to all!

Worse still, however, when, in the course of a few days, the corners of the mouths became sore from the pressure of the iron, and there was, for a time, the pain of a raw wound, as well as a day-by-day longer time of restraint to endure.—Masters and superiors, verily, there is a great responsibility in your hands! Nevertheless, it is not for the colts to sit in judgment.

Now then, how fared the three colts under the terrible, but at present, in some way or other, necessary training? (For even Egeria could not answer Firefly's maddened inquiries, by saying that in the East the bit and bridle and whip can be dispensed with.) Well, Whitefoot and Silverstar set out by intending to submit

if possible, and therefore they contrived to manage it at last—though more or less cheerfully at some times than others, and with more or less pain to themselves.

Firefly, on the contrary, started by a sort of resistance-on-principle plan. Wishing to resist, in fact, he always found a reason for resisting. If people treated him properly, he could submit as well as anyone else, he was sure; but if they ill-used him, what could they expect but that he should kick—kick—kick? And as to what proper treatment was, he made himself the sole judge. Certainly the training process just described was not proper, but on the contrary cruel and unjust, and accordingly kick, kick, kick, he went, whenever it was possible.

In vain Egeria begged him to forbear, seeing too late how much mischief her folly had done.

"It is so senseless to resist when you can't help yourself," said she.

"It is so mean to yield to an unjust necessity!" cried he.

And she dared not contradict herself so far as to suggest, that it might not be so unjust as it seemed.

"Will you listen to me once more?" asked she one day.

"If you talk sense, yes," replied Firefly; "not otherwise, old lady."

Egeria sighed; for his pert folly was but a stretched-out shadow of her own. Imperfect judgments; judgments formed on half-known grounds; judgments formed by the lesser intelligence concerning a greater which it cannot comprehend—what rebellion and ruin have they not caused!

"It is sense, if you have sense to find it out," cried Egeria, sharply. "It is downright wisdom. What I am going to say is truth and fact."

"I hear you; go on," said Firefly, impatiently.

"Well, if you go on kicking in this manner, every

time you think you nave—I beg your pardon—every time you have—a reason for kicking, you know, you will get into such a habit of kicking, that you will do it whether you have a reason or not."

"Shall I?" shouted Firefly, with contempt.

"Yes, you *will* though!" persisted Egeria, vexed alike by his obstinacy and ridicule. "If you kick every time you can find or make an excuse, you will be very apt to kick on when you have none."

"I have never yet kicked without a reason, old lady, and I don't intend to do so," answered Firefly.

"I know, I know," replied Egeria, "so far you have always proved yourself right *to yourself:* what the horsebreaker thinks is another matter. But, dear friend, try and believe me,—habits are such tremendous things! If you don't get into a habit of giving way, you mayn't be able to give way when you want, that's what I am afraid of. Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear."

"How can that happen to me, when I never kick without a reason?" cried Firefly.

At which moment he was fetched from the stable for a morning's lesson, and Egeria was left to fret alone. For fret she did, not being a bad creature on the whole, but such an inconsiderate old simpleton, both in her way of viewing life and talking about it to others!

And alas! there was but too much cause for fretting, when at the end of five weeks Firefly remained still untamed—still in the horsebreaker's hands! A fortnight ago both Whitefoot and Silverstar had taken leave of the place, had finished their education with respectability, and gone out into the world on their own account. There are plenty of good masters to be found for docile, well-taught creatures, and they had been picked up at once by two neighbouring families, and often met in their rides, and talked over old

times. Egeria heard of this from Taffy, who, from being constantly out, learnt all the news of the country-side, and had once or twice met his friends himself; and it must be owned she regretted Firefly's conduct all the more, that she feared she had had some share in it herself.

When Firefly was led out of the stable after Egeria had spoken, he had, for a few minutes, a misgiving that there might be some truth in what she had said. But the first crack of the horsebreaker's whip made his heart as hard as ever. He had accustomed himself for so long to look upon it, and him, and the whole affair, as a system of barbarous injustice, that he could not have rid himself of the notion without a strong effort, and there was one great difficulty to his making it—namely, that he must acknowledge himself to have been in the wrong before. And alas! he did not make it; and so another week went on, at the end of which the horsebreaker lost patience, and told Firefly's owner he was a hopeless kicker, and a very ill-conditioned animal as to temper, though otherwise with many good points, and a valuable beast.

It was not very pleasant news to the owner, but Firefly was so handsome in appearance, and moreover so strong and able to work, that he was undertaken at last by a very fearless young squire, who cared for little but pace and beauty, had a seat like a rock, put his faith in a strong curb, and had no scruple in using his spurs.

What Firefly underwent in his hands I do not wish to describe, though, even there, if he would but have submitted, his fate would not have been bad; for if the master loved galloping, so did Firefly himself. But again and again he would refuse to obey the curb, if it checked or turned him suddenly when his face was set elsewhere; and then like an instinct came the impulse to kick, kick, kick! and he followed it. For an hour sometimes the two would battle together—the spur

and the whip and the curb, against the insane determination to kick, kick, kick! And as to be conquered by main force and exhaustion is not to be reformed, Firefly was led away bleeding and foam-covered to his stable, as savage as when he left it, and still repeating the old strain, "If people treat me properly, I can submit as well as anyone else; but if they don't, what can they expect but that I shall kick, kick, kick?" Like the horsebreaker's whim of driving him round in an everlasting circle seemed the young squire's whim of checking him, and turning him round when he didn't expect it and wanted to go straight on. He kicked, therefore, strictly on principle, and all the more when the injustice was enforced by the spur and the lash. So the squire got tired of his purchase, and Firefly was sold again.

But this time to a very knowing hand, a country doctor, who after trying different plans in turn—low feed and good feed, kindness and severity—and finding both unsuccessful, took him back to the horsebreaker.

"He seems very hopeless at present," remarked he; "he kicks for nothing. But there is one more chance. Break him in for harness. Kicking-straps will perhaps bring him to his senses. At any rate try; he has many good qualities, and is a fine fellow. I hope he'll do well."

The horsebreaker shook his head, and led Firefly back to his old stable. Another colt occupied his former stall, but there were still two vacant. He was led into the middle one, and before nightfall Egeria was brought into the third.

Firefly told his story at length, and was too eager to hear Egeria's shuffles of impatience. "How unfortunate some people are!" observed she, when he ended; but there was a slight mockery in her tone.

"*I* have been so all along," said he; "I believe I am fated to ill-usage."

"People always are who will go nobody's way but

their own," was Egeria's answer; "why don't you do what is wanted? Go the way your master pulls you, and give up fighting for your own."

"If people treat me properly, I can submit——"

"Oh, do stop!" cried Egeria; "I've heard that much too often. You never *do* submit."

"Because they never——"

"Oh, they, they, they! Would they be masters, if you, and not they, were to lead the way?"

"Oh, as to *masters*, perhaps I have my own opinion," cried Firefly; "I wonder who has been master of the two I have had! But no matter about that. I could have borne leading, but I wouldn't be dragged. It was the curb and spurs and whip of that young squire I kicked against."

"And of your last master, the doctor, when he was kind?" asked Egeria.

"He wasn't always kind," muttered Firefly.

"But when he was?" insisted the old mare.

"Fool!" murmured Firefly, between his teeth; "was I likely to go his fidgety way—stopping at one house, then at another; no sooner started than having to stop; twisted down one lane and up another, never having a good run all the time; I, who had galloped over half a country-side in a morning with the squire? Kick! why, who wouldn't kick at a life like that?"

"It is as I feared," exclaimed Egeria. "Anybody who wants to kick, can find a reason for it, of course." And she spoke not another word, for she did not understand the matter to the bottom, as Taffy did; and so her way of argument was not convincing.

The first thing in the morning, however, Firefly spoke to her. He had a question to ask. Did she know what *kicking-straps* were? Perfectly; what made him want to know?

He repeated what the doctor had said.

"Capital!" said Egeria. "If you are put into those you will never be able to kick again."

"We shall see about that," groaned Firefly, grinding his teeth as if he were champing oats. "Masters—masters—masters, indeed !——"

In which state of mind he was taken out, two hours afterwards, put into kicking-straps, and had his first lesson of going in harness. The plan answered at first; but this was only while the shock of surprise and helplessness lasted. Still, being rather less wild, the horsebreaker returned him as "fit for harness, if driven in kicking-straps;" and Egeria twitted him when he left her, as being "fairly caught at last." "We shall see about that," muttered Firefly, fuming to himself, as the doctor drove him home. But the kicking-straps were amazingly strong, and he restrained himself. Nevertheless, the first principles of submission had not entered his head, and Egeria's folly and ridicule had done all that an unwise friend could do to confuse the truth.

The truth? Ah, we can only get at that by sitting in our neighbour's chair, and looking with his eyes. Had Firefly done this, he would have known why the kicking-straps were added to his harness, and have laid the blame on the right shoulders. As it was, he laid the blame on the doctor, and considered himself the victim of injustice.

So, one unlucky day, after a round of rather tiresome visiting, a very slight correction for impatience set his blood working; and, without thinking either of kicking-straps or consequences, he took the bit between his teeth, laid his ears down close to his head, muttering, "Masters, indeed!" to himself, and pulling madly at the reins, dashed at full speed down the narrow country-lane. They stopped him at last at a turnpike-gate, and as the kicking-straps had given way soon after he started, he concluded the day's work by smashing the splash-board to pieces, his master escaping with difficulty.

So he was sent back to the market-town, and resold.

It is impossible to pursue him through all his adventures; they were all, so to speak, variations upon the same set of notes—the battle of authority with one who refused to acknowledge its claims. A miserable struggle, whether of man or beast; whether against the powers ordained of God, or the God of power Himself; whether breaking out into open contest, or indulged in by inward repining.

At last, poor Firefly fell into the hands of a regular horse-dealer, who forwarded him to a neighbourhood where his tricks were not known, and after some weeks of low diet and constant work, sold him (more shame for the fact) to a quiet country clergyman, for a birthday present to his daughter, just bursting into the beauty of girlhood.

Now, by this time, our friend Firefly had had experience enough to discover that his habit of opposition was constantly bringing him into trouble. And though he was not sick of the bad habit, he was decidedly sick of the trouble, and every now and then was vexed with himself for giving way to it. And now and then he recalled Egeria's words, "Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear." Still, he could not remember a single case in which he had kicked without a very good reason—as it seemed to him—so he assured himself at least, and tried to forget that Egeria had also said, "Anybody who wants to kick can find a reason for kicking, of course!"

Now at last, however, came Firefly's halcyon days. What more could heart of horse desire than to belong to a gentle young girl, who was ready to love him, not only as her servant, but companion and friend? Egeria's tales of Eastern kindness came back to his mind again and again, as his new mistress brought him delicate morsels which she would fain have him eat from her hand; and when, as was generally the case, he could not overcome his repugnance, but started

back from her caresses, all she said was, the poor fellow was nervous and shy; perhaps—who knew—he had at some time or other been harshly used.

"This is as it should be," remarked Firefly; and he began to think better than ever of himself. The few misgivings he had lately had went to sleep. "*I* was right, and not Egeria," thought he, as he bore his light burden over her favourite haunt, the Downs; "I was right, and Egeria wrong. I told her I had never kicked without reason, and never should. It was nonsense about not being able to leave off."

And so he really believed, till, alas! the renewed good living brought back the impatience as well as fire into his blood, and what had he to restrain them with, who had not got the law in his heart? There followed one other week of self-confidence and enjoyment, and then——

. . . She was not in the least to blame—that beautiful young girl who had been so kind to him. He admitted this even to himself, when he saw her stretched at his feet; the eyes that had looked so kindly at him, closed; the rich black hair surrounding the white cheeks and forehead like a pall—the groom so horror-struck when he came up that he never thought of even laying hold of Firefly's bridle.

They had been out for a morning ride on the Downs, and she had wished to canter. For a day or two past, some evil spirit (evil spirits are so ingenious) had been whispering in his ear, that to be patronized was all very well, if it were not another form of unjust restraint. Masters? had he not proved himself the master in every case yet? And so he had done here—here, where, as Egeria had prophesied, he would have given worlds to forbear. Now rose before him the only half-valued tenderness, the anxiety for his daily comfort, the little personal sacrifices in his favour, and this as the conclusion; that because the canter had been prolonged, and she had wished to rest, and so

checked him with the bridle, the old habit had proved too strong for him, and prompted him to kick, kick, kick!—and he had kicked till she was stretched at his feet. . . .

More than an hour passed, and Firefly stood by her still,—stood in the same spot, seeing the same sight, without care to go his own way, now that he might have done it at will.

And then came the trampling of feet, horses and other men, and among them all a father in the first agony of despair. But no one noticed Firefly—he was nothing to his masters then, and so he stood on there like a horse of marble, in the same old place, looking at what he had done.

But presently some one who had been touching her wrist and had sprinkled her with water, whispered, "She is coming to herself!"

And it was true. Firefly's mistress had been stunned and one arm was hurt, but she awoke again to life; and when the poor father had wept out his joy on her neck, and she had looked up, she smiled to see so near them the creature who had caused this evil. Yes, there he stood, and his eye watched hers, as it first glanced at him, and then fixed on her father's face anxiously, while she murmured, "Promise me one thing, dear father. Let poor Firefly go to Rarey to be cured."

Masters?—*They* may well be masters and superiors, in whom the abiding spirit of forgiveness and love is triumphant! So Firefly was taken to Rarey; but what then happens to horses must be looked for in other books. This does not contain an argument on the merits of the different methods of horsebreaking; only thus much as regards Rarey's process is the turning point of the tale. The object aimed at is the subjection of the will, not merely the control of the body,—the full and complete recognition of the mastership and superiority of man. This, and this only, is what is

wanted when the legs are tied up, and struggles rendered powerless by force, so that the indignant animal is brought through exhaustion of body to submission of feeling. He has plunged, he has kicked, he has reared, for hours together, if he will have it so; but the man stands by him unscathed, unruffled, and still kind:—his master and superior—the terrible discipline proves it; but still kind—and the kindness proves it too.

All this Firefly went through; and when the Rarey-breaker "gentled" him all over his miserable frame, as he lay panting and overpowered on the sawdust, conquered and convinced at last, all his mistakes and misconceptions of other people came before him, as plainly as if Taffy himself had spoken them; so plainly, that he wondered at himself. But remembering his old and all-too-firmly-adhered-to resolution to kick, kick, kick, whenever he was vexed, a fresh outbreak of perspiration astonished the breaker so much, that he "gentled" and soothed the troubled spirit more and more tenderly, till Firefly could think of nothing like it but the father and daughter comforting each other on the Downs, that terrible day of his guilt.

And thus, at last, he learnt that it was possible for submission and love and happiness to go hand in hand together. Firefly was cured.

And then he was taken back to a home which he helped in his degree, however humble, to make what a home should be;—a circle in which animals, superior and inferior, should all work together each after its measure and kind, for the comfort and pleasure of all.

At last, therefore, he gave a willing obedience to every touch of his dear young lady's reins; and yet he feared her no longer as before; and yet he loved her more! Which is a great mystery, but the world repeats it in a thousand forms.

Animals under man—servants under masters—chil-

dren under parents—wives under husbands—men under authorities—nations under rulers—all under God,—it is the same with all:—in obedience of will is the only true peace.

Happy the colts who learn submission without a lifetime of personal struggle! Happy the men and women who find in the lesser obediences a practice-field of the greater; for assuredly the words of Egeria are true: "Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear."

VIII.

THE UNKNOWN LAND.

"But now they desire a better country."—HEBREWS xi. 16.

IT mattered not to the Sedge Warbler whether it were night or day:

She built her nest down among the willows, and reeds, and long thick herbage that bordered the great river's side, and in her sheltered covert she sang songs of mirth and rejoicing both by day and night.

"Where does the great river go to?" asked the little ones, as they peered out of their nest one lovely summer night, and saw the moonbeams dancing on the waters, as they hurried along. Now, the Sedge Warbler could not tell her children where the great river went to; so she laughed, and said they must ask the Sparrow who chattered so fast, or the Swallow who travelled so far, next time one or other came to perch on the willow-tree to rest. "And then," said she, "you will hear all such stories as these!"—and thereupon the Sedge Warbler tuned her voice to the Sparrow's note, and the little ones almost thought the

Sparrow was there, the song was so like his—all about towns, and houses, and gardens, and fruit-trees, and cats, and guns; only the Sedge Warbler made the account quite confused, for she had never had the patience to sit and listen to the Sparrow, so as readily to understand what he said about these matters.

But imperfect as the tale was, it amused the little ones very much, and they tried then to sing like it, and sang till they fell asleep; and when they awoke, they burst into singing again; for, behold! the eastern sky was red with the dawn, and they knew the warm sunbeams would soon send beautiful streaks of light in among the reeds and flags that sheltered their happy home.

Now, the Mother-bird would sometimes leave the little ones below, and go up into the willow-branches to sing alone; and as the season advanced, she did this oftener and oftener; and her song was plaintive and tender then, for she used to sing to the tide of the river, as it swept along she knew not whither, and think that some day she and her husband and children should all be hurrying so onward as the river hurried,—she knew not whither also,—to the Unknown Land whence she had come. Yes! I may call it the Unknown Land; for only faint images remained upon her mind of the country whence she had flown.

At first she used to sing these ditties only when alone, but by degrees she began to let her little ones hear them now and then,—for were they not going to accompany her? and was it not as well, therefore, to accustom them gradually to think about it?

Then the little ones asked her where the Unknown Land was. But she smiled, and said she could not tell them, for she did not know.

"Perhaps the great river is travelling there all alone," thought the eldest child. But he was wrong. The great river was rolling on hurriedly to a mighty city, where it was to stream through the arches of many

bridges, and bear on its bosom the traffic of many nations; restless and crowded by day; gloomy, dark, and dangerous by night! Ah! what a contrast were the day and night of the mighty city, to the day and night of the Sedge Warbler's home, where the twenty-four hours of changes God has appointed to nature were but so many changes of beauty!

"Mother, why do you sing songs about another land?" asked a young tender-hearted fledgling one day. "Why should we leave the reed-beds and the willow-trees? Cannot we all build nests here, and live here always? Mother, do not let us go away anywhere else. I want no other land, and no other home but this. There are all the aits in the great river to choose from, where we shall each settle; there can be nothing in the Unknown Land more pleasant than the reed-beds and the willow-trees here. I am so happy!—Leave off those dreadful songs!"

Then the Mother's breast heaved with many a varied thought, and she made no reply. So the little one went on—

"Think of the red glow in the morning sky, Mother, and the soft haze—and then the beautiful rays of warm light across the waters! Think of the grand noonday glare, when the broad flags and reeds are all burnished over with heat. Think of these evenings, Mother, when we can sit about in the branches—here, there, anywhere—and watch the great sun go down behind the sky; or fly to the aits of the great river, and sing in the long green herbage there, and then come home by moonlight, and sing till we fall asleep; and wake singing again, if any noise disturb us, if a boat chance to paddle by, or some of those strange bright lights shoot up with a noise into the sky from distant gardens. Think, even when the rain comes down, how we enjoy ourselves, for then how sweet it is to huddle into the soft warm nests together, and listen to the drops pattering upon the flags and leaves overhead! Oh, I

love this dear, dear home so much!—Sing those dreadful songs about another land no more!"

Then the Mother said—

"Listen to me, my child, and I will sing you another song."

And the Sedge Warbler changed her note, and sang to her tender little one of her own young days, when she was as happy and as gay as now, though not here among the reed-beds: and how, after she had lived and rejoiced in her happiness many pleasant months, a voice seemed to rise within her that said—"*This is not your Rest!*" and how she wondered, and tried not to listen, and tried to stop where she was, and be happy there still. But the voice came oftener and oftener, and louder and louder; and how the dear partner she had chosen heard and felt the same; and how at last they left their home together, and came and settled down among the reed-beds of the great river. And oh, how happy she had been!

"And where is the place you came from, Mother?" asked the little one. "Is it anywhere near, that we may go and see it?"

"My child," answered the Sedge Warbler, "it is the Unknown Land! Far, far away, I know: but *where*, I do not know. Only the voice that called me thence is beginning to call again. And, as I was obedient and hopeful once, shall I be less obedient and hopeful now—now that I have been so happy? No, my little one, let us go forth to the Unknown Land, wherever it may be, in joyful trust."

"*You* will be with me;—so I will," murmured the little Sedge Warbler in reply; and before she went to sleep she joined her young voice with her mother's in the song of the Unknown Land.

One day afterwards, when the parent birds had gone off to the sedgy banks of a neighbouring stream, another of the young ones flew to the topmost branches of some willow-trees, and, delighted with his

position, began to sing merrily, as he swung backwards and forwards on a bough. Many were the songs he tried, and well enough he succeeded for his age, and at last he tried the song of the Unknown Land.

"A pretty tune, and a pretty voice, and a pretty singer!" remarked a Magpie, who unluckily was crossing the country at the time, and whose mischievous spirit made him stop to amuse himself, by showing off to the young one his superior wisdom, as he thought it.

"I have been in many places, and even once was domesticated about the house of a human creature, so that I am a pretty good judge of singing," continued Mr. Mag, with a cock of his tail, as he balanced himself on a branch near the Sedge Warbler; "but, upon my word, I have seldom heard a prettier song than yours—only I wish you would tell me what it is all about."

"It is about the Unknown Land," answered the young Warbler, with modest pleasure, and very innocently.

"Do I hear you right, my little friend?" inquired the Magpie, with mock solemnity—"The *Unknown* Land, did you say? Dear, dear! to think of finding such abstruse philosophy among the marshes and ditches! it is quite a treat! And pray, now, what is there that you can tell an odd old fellow like me, who am always anxious to improve myself, about this Unknown Land?"

"I don't know, except that we are going there some day," answered the Sedge Warbler, rather confused by the Magpie's manner.

"Now, that is excellent!" returned the Magpie, chuckling with laughter. "How I love simplicity! and, really, you are a choice specimen of it, Mr. Sedge Warbler. So you are thinking of a journey to this Unknown Land, always supposing, of course, my sweet little friend, that you can find the way to it, which, between you and me, I think there must naturally be

some doubt about, under the circumstances of the place itself being unknown! Good evening to you, pretty Mr. Sedge Warbler, I wish you a pleasant journey!"

"Oh, stop, stop!" cried the young bird, now quite distressed by the Magpie's ridicule; "don't go just yet, pray. Tell me what you think yourself about the Unknown Land."

"Oh, you little wiseacre, are you laughing at me? Why, what can *any* body, even so clever a creature as yourself, *think* about an *unknown* thing? You can *guess*, I admit, anything you please, about it, and so could I, if I thought it worth while to waste my time so foolishly. But you will never get beyond *guessing* in such a case—at all events, I confess *my* poor abilities can't pretend to do anything more."

"Then you are not going there yourself?" murmured the overpowered youngster.

"Certainly not. In the first place, I am quite contented where I am; and, in the second place, I am not quite so easy of belief as you seem to be. How do I know there is such a place as this Unknown Land at all?"

"My father and mother told me that," answered the Sedge Warbler, with more confidence.

"Oh, your father and mother told you, did they?" sneered the Magpie, scornfully. "And you are a good little bird, and believe everything your father and mother tell you. And if they were to tell you you were going to live up in the moon, you would believe them, I suppose?"

"They never deceived me yet!" cried the young Sedge Warbler, firmly, his feathers ruffling with indignation as he spoke.

"Hoity, toity! what's the matter, now, my dainty little cock? Who said your father and mother *had* ever deceived you? But, without being a bit *deceitful*, I take the liberty to inform you that they may be extremely *ignorant*. And I shall leave you to decide

which of the two, yourself; for I declare, one gets nothing but annoyance by trying to be good-natured to you countrified young fellows. You are not fit to converse with a bird of any experience and wisdom. So, once for all, good-bye to you!"

And the Magpie flapped his wings, and was gone before the Sedge Warbler had half recovered from his fit of vexation.

There was a decided change in the weather that evening, for the summer was now far advanced, and a sudden storm had brought cooler breezes and more rain than usual, and the young birds wondered, and were sad, when they saw the dark sky, and the swollen river, and felt that there was no warm sunshine to dry the wet, as was usual after a mid-day shower.

"Why is the sky so cloudy and lowering, and why is the river so thick and gloomy, and why is there no sunshine, I wonder?" said one.

"The sun will shine again to-morrow, I dare say," was the Mother's answer; "but the days are shortening fast; and the storm has made this one very short; and the sun will not get through the clouds this evening. Never mind! the wet has not hurt the inside of our nest. Get into it, my dear ones, and keep warm, while I sing to you about our journey. Silly children, did you expect the sunshine to last here for ever?"

"I hoped it might, and thought it would, once, but lately I have seen a change," answered the young one who had talked to her mother so much before. "And I do not mind now, Mother. When the sunshine goes, and the wet comes, and the river looks dark and the sky black, I think about the Unknown Land."

Then the Mother was pleased, and, perched upon a tall flag outside the nest, she sang a hopeful song of the Unknown Land; and the father and children joined—all but *one!* He, poor fellow, would not, could not sing; but when the voices ceased, he murmured to his brothers and sisters in the nest—

"This would be all very pleasant and nice, if we could *know* anything about the Land we talk about."

"If we were to know too much, perhaps we should never be satisfied here," laughed the tender little one, who had formerly been so much distressed about going.

"But we know *nothing*," rejoined the other bird; "indeed, how do we know there is such a place as the Unknown Land at all?"

"We *feel* that there is, at any rate," answered the Sister-bird. "I have heard the call our mother tells about, and so must *you* have done."

"You fancy you have heard it, that is to say," cried the Brother; "because she told you. It is all fancy, all guesswork; no knowledge! I could fancy I heard it too, only I will not be so weak and silly; I will neither think about going, nor will I go."

"*This is not your Rest*," sang the Mother, in a loud clear voice, outside; and "*This is not your Rest*," echoed the others in sweet unison; and "*This is not your Rest*," sounded in the depths of the poor little Sedge Warbler's own heart.

"This is not our rest!" repeated the Mother. "The river is rushing forward; the clouds are hurrying onward; the winds are sweeping past, because here is not their Rest. Ask the river, ask the clouds, ask the winds where they go to:—Another Land! Ask the great sun, as he descends away out of sight, where he goes to:—Another Land! And when the appointed time shall come, let us also arise and go hence."

"Oh, Mother, Mother, would that I could believe you! Where is that other Land?" Thus cried the distressed doubter in the nest. And then he opened his troubled heart, and told what the Magpie had said, and the parent birds listened in silence, and when he ceased—

"Listen to me, my son," exclaimed the Mother, "and I will sing you another song."

Whereupon she spoke once more of the land she had left before; but now the burden of her story was,

that she had left it *without knowing why.* She "went out not knowing whither,"—in blind obedience, faith, and hope. As she traversed the wide waste of waters, there was no one to give her *reasons* for her flight, or tell her, "This and this will be your lot." Could the Magpie have told her, had he met her there? But had she been deceived? No! The secret voice which had called and led her forth, had been one of kindness. When she came to the reed-beds, she knew all about it. For then arose the strong desire to settle. Then she and her dear partner lived together. And then came the thought that she must build a nest. Ah! had the Magpie seen her then, building a home for children yet unborn, how he would have mocked at her! What could she *know*, he would have asked, about the future? Was it not all *guess-work*, fancy, folly? But had she been deceived? No! it was that voice of Kindness that had told her what to do. For did she not become the happy mother of children? And was she not now able to comfort and advise her little ones in their troubles? For, let the Magpie say what he would, was it likely that the voice of Kindness would deceive them at last? "No!" cried she; "in joyful trust let us obey the call, though now we know not why. When obedience and faith are made perfect, it may be that knowledge and explanation shall be given." So ended the Mother's strain, and no sad misgivings ever clouded the Sedge Warbler's home again.

Several weeks of changing autumn weather followed after this, and the chilly mornings and evenings caused the songs of departure to sound louder and more cheerily than ever in the reed-beds. They knew, they felt, they had confidence, that there was joy for them in the Unknown Land. But one dark morning, when all were busy in various directions, a sudden loud sound startled the young ones from their sports, and in terror and confusion they hurried home. The old nest looked looser and more untidy than ever

that day, for some water had oozed in through the half-worn bottom. But they huddled together into it, as of old, for safety. Soon, however, it was discovered that neither Father nor Mother was there; and after waiting in vain some time for their return, the frightened young ones flew off again to seek them.

Oh! weary weary search for the missing ones we love! It may be doubted whether the sad reality, when they came upon it, exceeded the agony of that hour's suspense.

It ended, however, at last! On a patch of long rank herbage which covered a mud bank, so wet that the cruel sportsman could not follow to secure his prey, lay the stricken parent birds. One was already dead, but the Mother still lived, and as her children's wail of sorrow sounded in her ear, she murmured out a last gentle strain of hope and comfort.

"Away, away, my darlings, to the Unknown Land. The voice that has called to all our race before, and never but for kindness, is calling to you now! Obey! Go forth in joyful trust! Quick! Quick! There's no time to be lost."

"But my Father—you—oh, my Mother!" cried the young ones.

"Hush, sweet ones, hush! We cannot be with you *there*. But there may be some other Unknown Land which *this* may lead to;" and the Mother laid her head against her wounded side and died.

Long before the sunbeams could pierce the heavy haze of the next autumn morning, the young Sedge Warblers rose for the last time over their much loved reed-beds, and took flight—"they knew not whither."

Dim and undefined hope, perhaps, they had, that they might find their parents again in the Unknown Land. And if one pang of grief struck them when these hopes ended, it was but for a moment, for, said the Brother-bird—

"There *may* be some other Unknown Land, better even than this, to which they may be gone."

IX.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."—MILTON.

"RESTLESS life! restless life!" moaned the Weathercock on the church tower by the sea, as he felt himself swayed suddenly round by the wind, and creaked with dismay; "restless, toiling life, and everybody complaining of one all the time. *There's that tiresome weathercock pointing east,* cried the old woman, as she hobbled up the churchyard path to the porch last Sunday; *now I know why I have got all my rheumatic pains back again.* Then, in a day or two, came the farmer by on his pony, and drew up outside the wall to have a word with the gravedigger. *A bad look-out, Tomkins,* said he, *if that rascally old weathercock is to be trusted; the wind's got into the wrong quarter again, and we shall have more rain.* Was it my fault if he did find out through me that the wind was in, what he called, *the wrong quarter?* Besides, the wind always is in somebody's wrong quarter, I verily believe! But am *I* to blame? Did I choose my lot? No, no! Nobody need suppose I should go swinging backwards and forwards, and round and round, all my life, telling people what they don't want to know, if I had my choice about the matter. Ah! how much rather would I lead the quiet, peaceful existence of my old friend, the Dial, down below yonder on his pedestal. That *is* a life, indeed!"

"How he is chattering away up above there," remarked the Dial from below; "he almost makes me smile, though not a ray of sunshine has fallen on me through the livelong day,—alas! I often wonder what he finds to talk about. But his active life gives him

subjects enough, no doubt. Ah! what would I not give to be like him! But all is so different with me,—alas! I thought I heard my own name too, just now. I will ask. Halloo! up above there. Did you call, my sprightly friend? Is there anything fresh astir? Tell me, if there is. I get so weary of the dark and useless hours; so common now,—alas! What have you been talking about?"

"Nothing profitable this time, good neighbour," replied the Weathercock; "for, in truth, you have caught me grumbling."

"Grumbling . . . . . ? Grumbling, *you?*"

"Yes, grumbling, I! Why not?"

"But grumbling in the midst of an existence so gay, so active, so bright," pursued the Dial; "it seems impossible."

"Gay, active, bright! a pretty description enough; but what a mockery of the truth it covers! Look at me, swinging loosely to every peevish blast that flits across the sky. Turned here, turned there, turned everywhere. The sport of every passing gust. Never a moment's rest, but when the uncertain breezes choose to seek it for themselves. Gay, active, bright existence, indeed! Restless, toiling life I call it, and all to serve a thankless world, by whom my very usefulness is abused. But you, my ancient friend, you, in the calm enjoyment of undisturbed repose, steady and unmoved amidst the utmost violence of storms, how little can you appreciate the sense of weariness I feel! A poor judge of my troubled lot are you in your paradise of rest!"

"My paradise of rest, do you call it?" exclaimed the Dial; "an ingenious title, truly, to express what those who know it practically, feel to be little short of a stagnation of existence. Dull, purposeless, unprofitable, at the mercy of the clouds and shades of night; I can never fulfil my end but by their sufferance, and in the seasons, rare enough at best, when their meddling

interference is withdrawn. And even when the sun and hour do smile upon me, and I carry out my vocation, how seldom does anyone come near me to learn the lessons I could teach. I weary of the night; I weary of the clouds; I weary of the footsteps that pass me by. Would that I could rise, even for a few brief hours, to the energy and meaning of a life like yours!"

"This is a strange fatality, indeed!" croaked the Weathercock in reply, "that you, in your untroubled calm, should yearn after the restlessness I sicken of. That I, in what you call my gay and active existence, should long for the quiet you detest!"

"You long for it because you are ignorant of its nature and practical reality," groaned the Dial.

"Nay, but those are the very words I would apply to you, my ancient friend. The blindest ignorance of its workings can alone account for your coveting a position such as mine."

"If that be so, then every position is wrong," was the murmured remark in answer; but it never reached the sky, for at that moment the mournful tolling of a bell in the old church-tower announced that a funeral was approaching, and in its vibrations the lesser sound was lost.

And as those vibrations gathered in the air, they grouped themselves into a solemn dirge, which seemed as if it rose in contradiction to what had just been said.

For it gave out to the mourners who were following the corpse to its last earthly resting-place, that every lot was good, and blessed to some particular end.

For the lots of all (it said) were appointed, and all that was appointed was good.

Little, little did it matter, therefore (it said), whether the lot of him who came to his last resting-place had been a busy or a quiet one; a high or a low one; one of

labour or of endurance. If that which was appointed to be done, had been well done, all was well.

It gave out, too, that every time and season was good, and blessed to some particular purpose; that the time to die was as good as the time to be born, whether it came to the child who had done but little, or to the man who had done much.

For the times and seasons (it said) were appointed, and all that was appointed was good.

Little, little did it matter, therefore (it said), whether the time of life had been a long one or a short one. If that which was appointed to be used had been rightly used, all was right.

Echoing and re-echoing in the air came these sounds out of the old bell-tower, bidding the mourners not to mourn, for both the lots and the times of all things were appointed, and all that was appointed was good.

The mourners wept on, however, in spite of the dirge of the bell; and perhaps it was best that they did so, for where are the outpourings of penitence so likely to be sincere, or the resolutions of amendment so likely to be earnest, as over the graves of those we love?

So the mourners wept; the corpse was interred; the clergyman departed, and the crowd dispersed; and then there was a quiet in the churchyard again for a time.

Uninterrupted quiet, except when the wandering gusts drove the Weathercock hither and thither, causing him to give out a dismal squeak as he turned.

But at last there was a footstep in the old churchyard again, a step that paced up and down along the paved path; now westward towards the sea, now eastward toward the Lych-gate at the entrance.

It was a weather-beaten old fisherman, once a sailor, who occasionally made of that place a forecastle walk for exercise and pondering thoughts, since the time

when age and growing infirmities had disabled him from following regularly the more toilsome parts of a fisherman's business, which were now carried on by his two grown-up sons.

He could do a stroke of work now and then, it is true, but the nows and thens came but seldom, and he had many leisure hours on his hands in which to think of the past, and look forward to the future.

And what a place was that churchyard for awakening such thoughts! There as he walked up and down the pavement, his own wife's grave was not many yards distant from his feet; and yet, from amidst these relics and bitter evidences of finite mortality, he could look out upon that everlasting sea, which seems always to stretch away into the infinity we all believe in.

Perhaps, in his own way, the sailor had often felt this, although he might not have been able to give any account of his sensations.

Up and down the path he paced, lingering always a little at the western point ere he turned; and with his telescope tucked under his arm ready for use, he stood for a second or two looking seaward in case a strange sail should have come in sight.

The sexton, who had come up to the churchyard again to finish the shaping of the new grave, nodded to him as he passed, and the sailor nodded in return; but neither of them spoke, for the sailor's habits were too well known to excite attention, and the sexton had his work to complete.

But presently, when half-way to the Lych-gate, the sailor stopped suddenly short, turned round hastily, and faced the sea, steadying the cap on his head against the gale which was now blowing directly on his face—looked up to the sky—looked all around—looked at the Weathercock, and then stood, as if irresolute, for several seconds.

At last, stepping over the grave-stones, he went

up to the stone pedestal, on the top of which the Dial lay, waiting for the gleams of sunshine which had on that day fallen rarely and irregularly upon it.

"—If the clouds would but break away for a minute,"—mused the old man to himself.

And soon after, they did so, for they had begun to drive very swiftly over the heavens, and the sunlight, streaming for a few seconds on the dial-plate, revealed the shadow of the gnomon cast upon the place of three o'clock.

The sailor lingered by the Dial for several minutes after he had ascertained the hour; examining the figures, inscriptions, and dates. A motto on a little brass plate was let into the pedestal below: "Watch, for ye know not the hour." There was some difficulty in reading it, it was so blotched and tarnished with age and long neglect. Indeed, few people knew there was an inscription there, at all; but the old sailor had been looking very closely, and so found it out, and then he spelt it all through, word by word.

It was to be hoped that the engraver (one Thomas Trueman), who claimed to have had this warning put up for the benefit of others, had attended to it himself, for he had long ago—ay! nearly a hundred years before —gone to his last account. The appointed hour had come for him, whether he had watched for it or not.

Perhaps some such thoughts crossed the sailor's mind, for certainly, after reading the sentence, he fell into a reverie. Not a long one, however, for it was interrupted by the voice of the sexton, who, with his mattock over his shoulder, was passing back on his way home, and called out to the sailor to bid him good evening.

"Good night, Mr. Bowman," said he; "we've rather a sudden change in the wind, haven't we?"

"Ay, ay," answered Bowman, by no means displeased at this deference to his opinion, and he

stepped back again to the path, and joined his village friend.

"It *is* a sudden change, as you say, and an awkward one too, for the wind came round at three o'clock, just at the turn of tide; and it's a chance but what it will keep this way for hours to come; and a gale all night's an ugly thing, Tomkins, when it blows ashore."

"I hope you may be mistaken, Mr. Bowman," rejoined the sexton; "but I suppose that's not likely. However, they say it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, so I suppose *I* shall come in for something at last," and here the sexton laughed.

"At your age, strong and hearty," observed the sailor, eyeing the sexton somewhat contemptuously, "you can't have much to wish for, I should think."

"Strong and hearty's a very good thing in its way, Mr. Bowman, I'll not deny; but rest's a very good thing too, and I wouldn't object to one of your idle afternoons now and then, walking up and down the pavement looking which way the wind blows. That's a bit of real comfort, to my thinking."

"We don't know much of each other's real comforts, I suspect," observed the sailor, abstractedly, and then he added—

"You'll soon be cured of wishing for idle afternoons when they are forced upon you, Tomkins. But you don't know what you're talking about. Wait till you're old, and then you'll find it's I that might be excused for envying you, and not you me."

"That's amazing, Mr. Bowman, and I can't see it," persisted Tomkins, turning round to depart. "In my opinion you've the best of it; but anyhow, we're both of us oddly fixed, for we're neither of us pleased."

With a friendly good-night, but no further remark, the two men parted, and the churchyard was emptied of its living guests.

When the sailor sat down with his sons an hour or two afterwards to their evening meal; said he, "We must keep a sharp look-out, lads, to-night; the wind came round at three with the turn of the tide, and it blows dead ashore. I've been up to the Captain's at the Hall, and borrowed the use of his big boat in case it's wanted, for unless the gale goes down with the next tide,—which it won't, I think,—we might have some awkward work. Anyhow, boys, we'll watch."

* * * * *

"Just what I said," muttered the Dial, as the sound of the last footsteps died on the churchyard path. "Just what I said! Everything's wrong, because everybody's dissatisfied. I knew it was so. We're right in grumbling; that's the only thing we're right in. At least, I'm sure *I'm* right in grumbling. I'm not so certain about my neighbour on the tower above. Halloo! my sprightly friend, do you hear? Did you notice? Isn't it just as I said? Everything's wrong to everybody."

The strong west wind continued to sweep through the churchyard, and bore these observations away; but the Weathercock meanwhile was making his own remarks to himself.

"There, now! There's the old story over again, only now it's the west wind that's wrong instead of the east! I wish anybody would tell me which is the *right* wind! But this, of course, is an ill wind, and an ugly gale, and they're afraid it will blow all night, (I wonder why it shouldn't, it blows very steadily and well, as *I* think,) and then they shake their heads at each other, and look up at me and frown. What's the use of frowning? They never saw me go better in their lives. It's a fine firm wind as ever blew, though it does take one's breath rather fast, I own. If it did not make quite so much howling noise, I should have had a word or two

about it with my old comrade below, who sits as steady as a rock through it all, I've no doubt. There *is* one thing I am not quite easy about myself. . . . . In case this west wind should blow a little, nay, in short, a great deal harder, even than now, I wonder whether there would be any danger of my being blown down? I'm not very fond of my present quarters, it's true, but a change is sometimes a doubtful kind of thing, unless you can choose what it shall be. I wonder, too, whether people would be glad if I was gone; or whether, after all, I mightn't be rather missed? And I wonder, too——"

But it began to blow too hard for wondering or talking, or doing anything, but silently holding fast, for the gale was rising rapidly; so rapidly that before midnight a hurricane was driving over land and ocean, and in its continued roaring, mingled as it was with the raging of a tempest-tossed sea, every other voice and sound was lost.

Tracts of white foam, lying like snow-fields on the water, followed the breakers as they fell down upon the shore with a crash of thunder, and were visible even through the gloom of night.

Hour after hour the uproar continued, and hour after hour the church clock struck, and no one heard. Due west pointed the Weathercock, varying scarcely a point. Firm and composed lay the Dial on his pedestal, and the old church on her foundations, mocking the tumult of the elements by their dead, immoveable calm.

In the village on the top of the cliff many were awakened by the noise; and one or two, as they lay listening in their beds, forgot for a time their own petty troubles and trifling cares, and uttered wishes and prayers that no vessels might be driven near that rock-bound shore, on that night of storm!

Vain wishes! vain prayers! As they turned again to their pillows to sleep, with their children around

them, housed in security and peace, the blue lights of distress were sent up by trembling hands into the vault of heaven, and agonized hearts wondered whether human eye would see them, or human hand could aid.

And it might easily have happened, that, in that terrible night, no eye had caught sight of the signals, or caught sight of them too late to be of use, or that those who had seen had been indifferent, or unable to help.

But it was not so, or the Weathercock would have pointed, and the Dial have shown the hour, and the sailor looked at both in vain.

And this was not the case!

People were roused from their pillowed slumbers the next morning to hear that a vessel, with a passenger crew on board of her, was driving on the rocks. From cottage casements, and from the drawing-room windows of houses on the top of the cliff, the fatal sight was seen, for the dismasted ship, rolling helplessly on the waters, drifted gradually in front of the village, looking black as if with the shadow of death.

Delicate women saw it, who, all unaccustomed to such sights, and shuddering at their own helplessness, could only sink on their knees, and ask if there was no mercy with the Most High. Men saw it whom age or sickness had made weak as children, but who had once been brave and strong; and their hearts burned within them as they turned away, and sickened at the spectacle of misery they could not even try to avert. Children saw it, who, mixing in the village crowd that by degrees gathered on the cliff, never ceased the vain prattling inquiry of why some good people did not go to help the poor people who were drowning in the ship?

"Young 'un, you talk," growled one old fellow, who was eyeing the spectacle somewhat coolly through a telescope; "and it's *for* such as you to talk; but who's to get off a boat over such a surf as yon? Little

use there'd be in flinging away more lives to save those that's as good as gone already."

"How you go on, Jonas!" cried a woman from the crowd. "Here's a lady has fainted through you're saying that; and what do you know about it? While there's life there's hope. My husband went down to the shore hours and hours ago, before it was light."

"With coffins, I suppose," shouted some one, and the jest went round, for the woman who had spoken was the sexton's wife. But many a voice cried "shame," as Mrs. Tomkins turned away to lend her aid in carrying the fainting lady to her home.

It was strange how time wore on, and no change for better or worse seemed to take place in the condition of the unhappy vessel, as far as those on land could judge of her. But she was at least a mile from shore! and even with a glass it was impossible to detect clearly the movements and state of her crew.

It was evident at one time that she had ceased to drift, and had become stationary, and all sorts of conjectures were afloat as to the cause; the most popular and dreadful of which being, that she was gradually filling with water, and must go down.

This was the reason (old Jonas said) why part of the crew had got into the boat that was being towed along behind by means of a rope, so that, when every other hope was over, the rest of the men might join them, and make a last desperate effort to escape the fate of the sinking vessel.

But still time wore on, and no change took place, nor did the vessel appear to get lower in the water, although at times the breakers rolled over her broken decks, and cries of "It's all over! There she goes!" broke from the crowd. The man at the helm seemed still to maintain his post; those in the boat behind still kept their places, and the few visible about the ship were busied, but no one could say how.

At last somebody shouted that they were raising a

jury-mast, though whether as a signal to some vessel within sight of them, or for their own use, remained doubtful for a time; but by and by a small sail became visible, and soon after, it was observed that the vessel had resumed her course, and that she was no longer drifting, but steering! It was clear, therefore, that she had been anchored previously, that the crew had not given up hope, and that they were now trying to weather the rocky bay, and get into the nearest harbour.

Old Jonas turned away, and lent his glass to others. The vessel was not filling with water, it was true, but could such a battered hulk, rolling as it did, ever live through the "race" at the extremity of the bay? He doubted it, for his part—but he was disposed to doubt!

Others were more hopeful, and many a "Thank God for His goodness" relieved the anxious breasts of those who had hitherto looked on in trembling suspense.

The villagers were gradually dispersing to their different occupations, when a couple of boys, who had gone down by the cliffs to the shore, came running breathless back with the news that the old sailor's (Mr. Bowman's) cottage, the only one near the shore, was shut up, the key gone, and nobody there. This new surprise was heartily welcome, coming as it did to enliven the natural reaction of dulness that follows the cessation of great excitement; and the good wives of the village, with their aprons over their heads, huddled together, more full of wonder and conjecture over the disappearance of the Bowmans, than over the fate of the still peril-surrounded ship. It was then discovered, but quite by an accident, that some one else had disappeared—no other than Tomkins, the sexton. A neighbour, on her road home, accidentally dropping in at Mr. Tomkins's door, to ask after the lady that had fainted, found the good woman sitting over the fire, rocking to and fro, and crying her heart out.

"Go away, woman!" cried she to her neighbour, as the door opened. "Get away wi' ye! I want none of

ye! I want none of your talking! I'll not listen to any of ye till I know whether the ship's gone down or not!"

"The woman's beside herself!" cried the neighbour "Why, you don't know what you are saying, surely. The ship isn't likely to go down now! There's a mast and a sail up, woman!"

"Ay, ay, but the 'race,'" cried Mrs. Tomkins, rocking to and fro in despair.

"The 'race' will not hurt it, there's a many says. It was only old Jonas that shook his head over that. Eh, woman, but you've lost your head with watching them. Where's your good man?"

Mrs. Tomkins almost shrieked, "*There!* he's *there—with them!* I saw him through Jonas's glass."

The neighbour was thunderstruck. Here was news indeed. But she pressed the matter no further, thinking in truth that Mrs. Tomkins's head was unsettled; and so, after soothing her a bit in the best fashion she could, she left her to talk the matter over in the village.

Mrs. Tomkins was not unsettled in her head at all. She had been one of those who had had a peep through Jonas's glass, and, to her horror, had detected, by some peculiarity of dress, the form of her husband sitting in the boat behind the vessel. The terror and astonishment that seized her rendered her mute, and she had retired to her own cottage to think it out by herself—what it could mean, and how it could have happened—but she had caught Jonas's remark about the "race," and on reaching her own fireside, all thoughts merged in the one terrible idea that her husband might go down with the devoted ship.

The report of Mrs. Tomkins's hallucination soon spread, and there is no saying to what a pitch of mysterious belief in some supernatural visitation it might not have led, had not the arrival of Bowman's daughter in the village, and the account she gave, explained the whole affair.

Bowman and his sons had not gone regularly to bed at all on the night previous, but, true to their intention, had kept watch in turn, walking up and down along the front of their cottage, which stood upon ground slightly raised above the shore. It was the old man himself who happened to be watching when the first blue lights went up, and it was then considerably past midnight.

"What a mercy!" was his first exclamation, after hurrying to the cottage, and bidding his sons follow him to the Hall; "what a mercy!" and he threw up his right arm with a clenched fist into the air, his whole frame knit up by strong emotion. The boys, not knowing what he meant, had only stared at him in surprise for a moment, for there was no time for talking. But the mind of the old man had, with the first sight of the blue lights, gone back to his churchyard lounge, to his observations on the weather, to the startling inscription, and to his determination to watch and provide. It had gone forward, too, as well as backward. Forward, with the elastic determination, and hope, which comes like inspiration to a good cause; and for him by anticipation the daring deed had been done, and the perishing crew rescued. "—What a mercy!"—the exclamation comprehended past, present, and future.

As by the position of the signals of distress, Bowman judged it would be best to put off the boat from the place where it usually lay, he locked up his cottage (for the girl refused to be left there alone), taking the key with him, and proceeded at once to the Hall; then recollecting that his friend, the sexton, had made an urgent request to be called should any disaster occur, he sent one of the lads up the cliff to the village, to give notice of what they were about.

But before the boy was half-way there, he met poor Tomkins himself, who, rendered restless and uneasy by Bowman's fears and the terrible weather, had come out

to inquire how matters were going on. Thus, therefore, he joined their expedition at once, while his wife remained as ignorant of his movements as the rest ot the village.

The Captain, a fine old sailor, round the evening of whose days the glories of Trafalgar shed an undying halo, had made it clearly understood, when first applied to, that, in case of the boat being wanted, his own assistance also might be depended upon; and he was true to his word; so that as soon as the dawn had broken, five men were to be seen on the beach under the Hall, up to their waists almost in water, struggling with the foaming breakers, and pushing off, with an energy which nothing but the most desperate resolution could have given them, a boat from the shore. Few words were spoken; the one man gave orders, and the rest obeyed—promptly, implicitly, and willingly, as if they had worked for years in company; and thus, life and death at stake, they rowed over the waste of waters with mute courage, and a hope which never for an instant blinded them to the knowledge of the peril they incurred.

And thus it was that ere the full daylight had revealed to the villagers the disaster at sea, and even while they were shuddering for the fate of the supposed doomed vessel, help and comfort had reached the despairing hearts of the bewildered men on board.

There were plenty of people afterwards to say that anybody might have known—if they had only thought about it—that that man who was lashed to the helm, and who had never changed his position for an instant, could have been nobody but the grand old Captain who had been so long in the wars!

There were plenty also to say that Bowman, old as he was, was constantly on the look-out, and was sure to be the first to foresee a disaster, and suggest what ought to be done, even when he could not do it himself! and didn't everybody know, too, that Tomkins was

always foremost to have a hand in a job, whatever it might be?

The vessel cleared the "race," and got safe to the next harbour, and half the village went with Bowman's daughter and Mrs. Tomkins (now weeping as hard for joy as she had before done for terror), to meet them as they landed.

What a talking there was! and what bowing to the Captain, who, dripping wet and cold, had nevertheless a joke for everybody, and even made Mrs. Tomkins smile by saying her husband had come with them on the look-out for a job, but happily his professional services had not been required, though he had done his duty otherwise like a man.

But the wet fellow-labourers had to be dried and taken care of, and the half-exhausted crew had to be attended to and comforted; and the time for chatting comfortably over the events of that night did not come till people's minds and spirits had cooled down from the first excitement.

* * * * *

The weather cleared up wonderfully after that terrible storm had passed over, and the following Sunday shone out over village and sea with all the brilliancy of spring.

It was just as they were issuing from church after morning service, that the Captain observed Bowman standing by the porch, as if waiting till the crowd had passed. He looked far more upright than usual, and had more of a smile upon his face than was commonly seen there. The Captain beckoned to him to come and speak, and Bowman obeyed.

"This has made a young man of you, Bowman," was the Captain's observation, and he smiled.

"It has comforted me, sir, I'll not deny," was Bowman's answer.

"I hope it will *teach* as well as comfort you," con-

tinued the Captain, with a half good-natured, half stern manner. "You've been very fond of talking of age and infirmity, and 'cumbering the ground,' and all that sort of thing. But what it *means* is, quarrelling with your lot. We may not always know what we're wanted for, nor is it for us to inquire, but nobody is useless as long as he is permitted to live. You can't have a shipwreck every day to prove it, Bowman, but this shipwreck ought to teach you the lesson for the rest of your life."

"I hope it will, sir," cried Bowman.

"Not that you've so much credit in that matter, after all, as I thought," observed the Captain, with a sly smile. "By your own account, if it hadn't been for these comrades of yours in the churchyard here," and as he spoke the Captain pointed with his stick to the Dial and Weathercock, "you might have gone to bed and snored composedly all the night through, without thinking of whether the storm would last, or what it would do."

Bowman touched his hat in compliment to the joke, recollecting with a sort of confusion that, as they were bringing the vessel into port, he had told the Captain the whole story of his noticing the change of wind at the particular hour of three, harping nervously and minutely on the importance of each link in the little chain of events, and dwelling much on the half-effaced inscription, the words of which had never left his mind, from the moment when he got into the Captain's boat to that when they reached the shore in safety.

Scarcely knowing how to reply, Bowman began again—

"Well, your honour, it's really true, for if it hadn't been that——"

"I know, I know," interrupted the Captain, laughing. "And now let us see your friends. I must have a peep at the inscription myself."

The old sailor led the way over the grassy graves to

the Dial, and pointed out to his companion the almost illegible words.

There was a silence for several minutes, after the Captain had bent his head to read; and when he raised it again, his look was very grave. Except for the mercy that had spared their lives in so great a risk, *the hour* might have been over for them.

"Bowman," cried the Captain at length, in his old good-natured way, "these comrades of yours shall not go unrewarded any more than yourself. Before another week is over, you must see that this plate is cleaned and burnished, so that all the parish may read the inscription; and as to the Weathercock, I must have him as bright as gilding can make him before another Sunday. Come, here's work for you for the week, and the seeing that this is done will leave you no time for grumbling, eh, old fellow?"

Bowman bowed his lowest bow. It fell in with all his feelings to superintend such an improvement as this.

"And while you're looking after them, don't forget the lesson they teach," continued the Captain.

Bowman bowed again, and was attentive.

"I mean that everything, as well as everybody, is useful in its appointed place, at the appointed time. But neither we nor they can choose or foresee the time."

On the following Sunday, the sun himself scarcely exceeded in brilliancy the flashing Weathercock which hovered gently between point and point on the old church-tower by the sea, as if to exhibit his splendour to the world. Not a creak did he make as he moved, for all grumbling was over, and he was suspended to a nicety on his well-oiled pole. Below, and freshly brightened up and cleaned, the Dial basked in the sunlight, telling one by one the fleeting hours, while the motto underneath it spoke its warning, in letters illuminated as if with fire. Many a villager hung about

the once neglected plate, and took to heart those words of divine wisdom,

"Watch, for ye know not the hour:"

and many an eye glanced up to the monitor of storms and weather, and echoed the "What a mercy!" of old Bowman the sailor.

* * * * * *

"Are you silent, my sprightly comrade?" inquired the Dial from below, of his shining friend above.

"Only a little confused and overpowered at first," was the answer of the Weathercock. "My responsibility is great, you know. I have a great deal to do, and all the world is observing me just now."

"That's true, certainly," continued the Dial. "Things are coming round in a singular manner. Everything's right, after all; but under such a cloud as we were a short time ago, it was not very easy to find it out."

"Undoubtedly not, and a more excusable mistake than ours could not well be imagined. People with fifty times our advantages, are constantly falling into the same errors."

"Which is *such* a comfort," pursued the Dial, smiling as he glowed in the sunbeams. "However," added he, "that's a good idea of the old gentleman that was here just now, and I shall try and remember it for future occasions, for it really appears to be true. 'Everything is useful in its place at the appointed time.' That was it, wasn't it?"

"Exactly. And, conscious as I feel just now of my own responsibility, I could almost add, (in confidence to you, of course, my ancient friend,) that I have a kind of sensation that everything is useful in its place, always, and at all times, though people mayn't always find it out."

"Just my own impression," was the Dial's last remark.

X.

NOT LOST, BUT GONE BEFORE.

"——— Will none of you, in pity
To those you left behind, disclose the secret?"
BLAIR'S *Grave.*

"I WONDER what becomes of the Frog, when he climbs up out of this world, and disappears, so that we do not see even his shadow; till, plop! he is among us again, when we least expect him. Does anybody know where he goes to? Tell me, somebody, pray!"

Thus chattered the grub of a Dragon-fly, as he darted about with his numerous companions, in and out among the plants at the bottom of the water, in search of prey.

The water formed a beautiful pond in the centre of a wood. Stately trees grew around it and reflected themselves on its surface, as on a polished mirror; and the bulrushes and forget-me-nots which fringed its sides, seemed to have a two-fold life, so perfect was their image below.

"Who cares what the Frog does?" answered one of those who overheard the Grub's inquiry; "what is it to us?"

"Look out for food for yourself," cried another, "and let other people's business alone."

"But I have a curiosity on the subject," expostulated the first speaker. "I can see all of you when you pass by me among the plants in the water here; and when I don't see you any longer, I know you have gone further on. But I followed a Frog just now as he went upwards, and all at once he went to the side of the water, and then began to disappear and presently he

was gone. Did he leave this world, do you think? And what can there be beyond?"

"You idle, talkative fellow," cried another, shooting by as he spoke, "attend to the world you are in, and leave the 'beyond,' if there is a 'beyond,' to those that are there. See what a morsel you have missed with your wonderings about nothing." So saying, the saucy speaker seized an insect which was flitting right in front of his friend.

The curiosity of the Grub was a little checked by these and similar remarks, and he resumed his employment of chasing prey for a time.

But, do what he would, he could not help thinking of the curious disappearance of the Frog, and presently began to tease his neighbours about it again, *What becomes of the Frog when he leaves this world?* being the burden of his inquiry.

The minnows eyed him askance and passed on without speaking, for they knew no more than he did of the matter, and yet were loth to proclaim their ignorance; and the eels wriggled away in the mud out of hearing, for they could not bear to be disturbed.

The Grub got impatient, but he succeeded in inspiring several of his tribe with some of his own curiosity, and then went scrambling about in all directions with his followers, asking the same unreasonable questions of all the creatures he met.

Suddenly there was a heavy splash in the water, and a large yellow Frog swam down to the bottom among the grubs.

"Ask the Frog himself," suggested a Minnow, as he darted by overhead, with a mischievous glance of his eye. And very good advice it seemed to be, only the thing was much easier said than done. For the Frog was a dignified sort of personage, of whom the smaller inhabitants of the water stood a good deal in awe. It required no common amount of assurance to ask a creature of his standing and gravity, where he had been to.

and where he had come from. He might justly consider such an inquiry as a very impertinent piece of curiosity.

Still, such a chance of satisfying himself was not to be lost, and after taking two or three turns round the roots of a water-lily, the Grub screwed up his courage, and approaching the Frog in the meekest manner he could assume, he asked—

"Is it permitted to a very unhappy creature to speak?"

The Frog turned his gold-edged eyes upon him in surprise, and answered—

"Very unhappy creatures had better be silent; I never talk but when I am happy."

"But *I* shall be happy if I may talk," interposed the Grub, as glibly as possible.

"Talk away, then," cried the Frog; "what can it matter to me?"

"Respected Frog," replied the Grub, "but it is something I want to ask you."

"Ask away," exclaimed the Frog, not in a very encouraging tone, it must be confessed; but still the permission was given.

"What is there beyond the world?" inquired the Grub, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion.

"What world do you mean?" cried the Frog, rolling his goggle eyes round and round.

"This world, of course;—our world," answered the Grub.

"This pond, you mean," remarked the Frog, with a contemptuous sneer.

"I mean the place we live in, whatever you may choose to call it," cried the Grub pertly. "*I* call it the world."

"Do you, sharp little fellow?" rejoined the Frog. "Then what is the place you don't live in, the 'beyond' the world, eh?"

And the Frog shook his sides with merriment as he spoke.

"That is just what I want you to tell me," replied the Grub briskly.

"Oh, indeed, little one!" exclaimed Froggy, rolling his eyes this time with an amused twinkle. "Come, I shall tell you then. It is dry land."

There was a pause of several seconds, and then, "Can one swim about there?" inquired the Grub, in a subdued tone.

"I should think not," chuckled the Frog. "Dry land is not water, little fellow. That is just what it is *not*."

"But I want you to tell me what it *is*," persisted the Grub.

"Of all the inquisitive creatures I ever met, you certainly are the most troublesome," cried the Frog. "Well, then, dry land is something like the sludge at the bottom of this pond, only it is not wet, because there is no water."

"Really!" interrupted the Grub; "what is there then?"

"That's the difficulty," exclaimed Froggy. "There is something, of course, and they call it air; but how to explain it I don't know. My own feeling about it is, that it's the nearest approach to nothing, possible. Do you comprehend?"

"Not quite," replied the Grub, hesitating.

"Exactly; I was afraid not. Now just take my advice, and ask no more silly questions. No good can possibly come of it," urged the Frog.

"Honoured Frog," exclaimed the Grub, "I must differ from you there. Great good will, as I think, come of it, if my restless curiosity can be stilled by obtaining the knowledge I seek. If I learn to be contented where I am, it will be something. At present I am miserable and restless under my ignorance."

"You are a very silly fellow," cried the Frog, "who will not be satisfied with the experience of others. I

tell you the thing is not worth your troubling yourself about. But, as I rather admire your spirit, (which, for so insignificant a creature, is astonishing,) I will make you an offer. If you choose to take a seat on my back, I will carry you up to dry land myself, and then you can judge for yourself what there is there, and how you like it. I consider it a foolish experiment, mind, but that is your own look out. I make my offer, to give you pleasure."

"And I accept it with a gratitude that knows no bounds," exclaimed the enthusiastic Grub.

"Drop yourself down on my back, then, and cling to me as well as you can. For, remember, if you go gliding off, you will be out of the way when I leave the water."

The Grub obeyed, and the Frog, swimming gently upwards, reached the bulrushes by the water's side.

"Hold fast," cried he, all at once, and then, raising his head, out of the pond, he clambered up the bank, and got upon the grass.

"Now, then, here we are," exclaimed he. "What do you think of dry land?"

But no one spoke in reply.

"Halloo! gone?" he continued; "that's just what I was afraid of. He has floated off my back, stupid fellow, I declare. Dear, dear, how unlucky! but it cannot be helped. And, perhaps, he may make his way to the water's edge here, after all, and then I can help him out. I will wait about and see."

And away went Froggy, with an occasional jaunty leap, along the grass by the edge of the pond, glancing every now and then among the bulrushes, to see if he could spy the dark, mailed figure of the Dragon-fly Grub.

But the Grub, meanwhile? Ah, so far from having floated off the Frog's back through carelessness, he had clung to it with all the tenacity of hope, and the moment came when the mask of his face began to issue from the water.

But the same moment sent him reeling from his resting-place into the pond, panting and struggling for life. A shock seemed to have struck his frame, a deadly faintness succeeded, and it was several seconds before he could recover himself.

"Horrible!" cried he as soon as he had rallied a little. "Beyond this world there is nothing but death. The Frog has deceived me. He cannot be *there*, at any rate."

And with these words, the Grub moved away to his old occupations; his ardour for inquiry grievously checked, though his spirit was unsubdued.

He contented himself for the present, therefore, with talking over what he had done, and where he had been, with his friends. And who could listen unmoved to such a recital? The novelty, the mystery, the danger, the all but fatal result, and the still unexplained wonder of what became of the Frog,—all invested the affair with a romantic interest, and the Grub had soon a host of followers of his own race, questioning, chattering, and conjecturing, at his heels.

By this time the day was declining, and the active pursuit of prey was gradually becoming suspended for a time; when, as the inquisitive Grub was returning from a somewhat protracted ramble among the water-plants, he suddenly encountered, sitting pensively on a stone at the bottom of the pond, his friend the yellow Frog.

"*You* here!" cried the startled Grub; "you never left this world at all then, I suppose. What a deception you must have practised upon me! But this comes of trusting to strangers, as I was foolish enough to do."

"You perplex me with your offensive remarks," replied the Frog, gravely. "Nevertheless, I forgive you, because you are so clumsy and ignorant, that civility cannot reasonably be expected from you, little fellow. It never struck you, I suppose, to think what *my* sen-

sations were, when I landed this morning on the grass, and discovered that you were no longer on my back. Why did you not sit fast as I told you? But this is always the way with you foolish fellows, who think you can fathom and investigate everything. You are thrown over by the first practical difficulty you meet."

"Your accusations are full of injustice," exclaimed the indignant Grub.

It was clear they were on the point of quarrelling, and would certainly have done so, had not the Frog, with unusual magnanimity, desired the Grub to tell his own story, and clear himself from the charge of clumsiness if he could.

It was soon told; the Frog staring at him in silence out of those great goggle eyes, while he went through the details of his terrible adventure.

"And now," said the Grub in conclusion, "as it is clear that there is nothing beyond this world but death, all your stories of going there yourself must be mere inventions. Of course, therefore, if you do leave this world at all, you go to some other place you are unwilling to tell me of. You have a right to your secret, I admit; but as I have no wish to be fooled by any more travellers' tales, I will bid you a very good evening."

"You will do no such thing, till you have listened as patiently to my story as I have done to yours," exclaimed the Frog.

"That is but just, I allow," said the Grub, and stopped to listen.

Then the Frog told how he had lingered by the edge of the pond, in the vain hope of his approach, how he had hopped about in the grass, how he had peeped among the bulrushes. "And at last," continued he, "though I did not see you yourself, I saw a sight which has more interest for you, than for any other creature that lives," and there he paused.

"And that was?" asked the inquisitive Grub,

his curiosity reviving, and his wrath becoming appeased.

"Up the polished green stalk of one of those bulrushes," continued the Frog, "I beheld one of your race slowly and gradually climbing, till he had left the water behind him, and was clinging firmly to his chosen support, exposed to the full glare of the sun. Rather wondering at such a sight, considering the fondness you all of you show for the shady bottom of the pond, I continued to gaze, and observed presently,—but I cannot tell you in what way the thing happened,—that a rent seemed to come in your friend's body, and by degrees, gradually and after many struggles, there emerged from it one of those radiant creatures who float through the air I spoke to you of, and dazzle the eyes of all who catch glimpses of them as they pass,—a glorious Dragon-fly!

"As if scarcely awakened from some perplexing dream, he lifted his wings out of the carcase he was forsaking; and though shrivelled and damp at first, they stretched and expanded in the sunshine, till they glistened as if with fire.

"How long the strange process continued, I can scarcely tell, so fixed was I in astonishment and admiration; but I saw the beautiful creature at last poise himself for a second or two in the air before he took flight. I saw the four gauzy pinions flash back the sunshine that was poured on them. I heard the clash with which they struck upon the air; and I beheld his body give out rays of glittering blue and green as he darted along, and away, away, over the water in eddying circles that seemed to know no end. Then I plunged below to seek you out, rejoicing for your sake in the news I brought."

The Frog stopped short, and a long pause followed.

At last—"It is a wonderful story," observed the Grub, with less emotion than might have been expected.

"A wonderful story, indeed," repeated the Frog; "may I ask your opinion upon it?"

"It is for me to defer mine to yours," was the Grub's polite reply.

"Good! you are grown obliging, my little friend," remarked the Frog. "Well, then, I incline to the belief, that what I have seen accounts for your otherwise unreasonable curiosity, your tiresome craving for information about the world beyond your own."

"That were possible, always provided your account can be depended upon," mused the Grub with a doubtful air.

"Little fellow," exclaimed the Frog, "remember that your distrust cannot injure me, but may deprive yourself of a comfort."

"And you really think, then, that the glorious creature you describe was once a ——"

"Silence," cried the Frog; "I am not prepared with definitions. Adieu! the shades of night are falling on your world. I return to my grassy home on dry land. Go to rest, little fellow, and awake in hope."

The Frog swam close to the bank, and clambered up its sides, while the Grub returned to his tribe, who rested during the hours of darkness, from their life of activity and pursuit.

* * * * * *

"Promise!" uttered an entreating voice.

"I promise," was the earnest answer.

"Faithfully?" urged the first speaker.

"Solemnly," ejaculated the second.

But the voice was languid and weak, for the Dragonfly Grub was sick and uneasy. His limbs had lost their old activity, and a strange oppression was upon him.

The creatures whom he had been accustomed to chase, passed by him unharmed; the water-plants over which he used to scramble with so much agility, were

distasteful to his feet; nay, the very water itself in which he had been born, and through which he was wont to propel himself with so much ingenuity, felt suffocating in its weight.

Upwards he must go now, upwards, upwards! That was the strong sensation which mastered every other, and to it he felt he must submit, as to some inevitable law. And then he thought of the Frog's account, and felt a trembling conviction that the time had come, when the riddle of his own fate must be solved.

His friends and relations were gathered around him, some of his own age, some a generation younger, who had only that year entered upon existence. All of them were followers and adherents, whom he had inspired with his own enthusiastic hopes; and they would fain have helped him, if they could, in this his hour of weakness. But there was no help for him now, but hope, and of that he possessed, perhaps, even more than they did.

Then came an earnest request, and then a solemn promise, that, as surely as the great hopes proved true, so surely would he return and tell them so.

"But, oh! if you should forget?" exclaimed one of the younger generation, timid and uneasy.

"Forget the old home, my friend!" ejaculated the sick Grub, "forget our life of enjoyment here, the ardour of the chase, the ingenious stratagems, the triumph of success? Forget the emotions of hope and fear we have shared together, and which I am bound, if I can, to relieve? Impossible!"

"But if you should not be able to come back to us," suggested another.

"More unlikely still," murmured the half-exhausted Grub. "To a condition so exalted as the one in store for us, what can be impossible? Adieu, my friends, adieu! I can tarry here no longer. Ere long you may expect to see me again in a new and more glorious form. Till then, farewell!"

Languid, indeed, was the voice, and languid were the movements of the Grub, as he rose upwards through the water to the reeds and bulrushes that fringed its bank. Two favourite brothers, and a few of his friends, more adventurous than the rest, accompanied him in his ascent, in the hope of witnessing whatever might take place above; but in this they were, of course, disappointed.

From the moment, when, clinging with his feet to the stem of a bulrush, he emerged from his native element into the air, his companions saw him no more.

Eyes fitted only for the watery fluid were incapable of the upward glance and power of vision which would have enabled them to pierce beyond it; and the little coterie of discoverers descended, mortified and sorrowful, to the bed of the pond.

The sun was high in the heavens when the Dragon-fly Grub parted from his friends, and they waited through the long hours of the day for his return; at first, in joyful hope, then in tremulous anxiety; and, as the shades of evening began to deepen around, in a gloomy fear, that bordered at last on despair. "He has forgotten us," cried some. "A death from which he never can awake has overtaken him," said others.

"He will return to us yet," maintained the few who clung to hope.

But in vain messenger after messenger shot upwards to the bulrushes, and to various parts of the pond, hoping to discover some trace of the lost one. All who went out returned back dispirited from the vain and weary search, and even the most sanguine began to grow sick at heart.

Night closed at last upon them, bringing a temporary suspension of grief; but the beams of the next rising sun, while it filled all nature beside with joy and hopefulness, awakened them, alas! to a sense of the bitterest disappointment, and a feeling of indignation at the deception which had been practised upon them.

"We did very well without thinking of such things," said they; "but to have hopes like those held out, and to be deceived, after all,—it is more than we can be expected to bear in patience."

And bear it in patience they did not. With a fierceness which nothing could restrain, they hurried about in the destructive pursuit of prey, carrying a terrible vengeance in all directions.

And thus passed on the hours of the second day, and before night a sort of grim and savage silence was agreed upon among them, and they ceased to bewail either the loss of him they had loved, or their own uncertain destiny.

But on the morning of the third day, one of the Grub's favourite brothers came sailing into the midst of a group who were just rousing up from rest, ready to recommence the daily business of their life.

There was an unnatural brilliancy about his eyes, which shone as they had never done before, and startled all who looked at them, so that even the least observant had their attention arrested as he spoke.

"My friends," said he, "I was, as you know, one of our lost relative's favourite brothers. I trusted him as if he had been a second self, and would have pledged myself a thousand times for his word. Judge, then, what I have suffered from his promise remaining still unfulfilled. Alas! that he has not yet returned to us!"

The favourite brother paused, and a little set in a corner by themselves murmured out, "How could he? The story about that other world is false."

"He has not returned to us," recommenced the favourite brother. "But, my friends, I feel that I am going to him, wherever that may be, either to that new life he spoke about, or to that death from which there is no return. Dear ones! I go, as he did, upwards, upwards, upwards! An irresistible desire compels me to it; but before I go, I renew to you—for myself and him—the solemn promise he once made to you. Should

the great hopes be true, we will come back and tell you so. If I return not—— But rely on me; my word is more to me than life. Adieu!"

The Grub rose upwards through the water, followed by the last of the three brothers, and one or two of the younger ones; but on reaching the brink of the pond, he seized on a plant of the forget-me-not, and, clinging to its firm flower-stalk, clambered out of the water into the open air.

Those who accompanied him watched him as he left the water; but, after that, they saw no more. The blank of his departure alone remained to them, and they sank down, sad and uneasy, to their home below.

As before, the hours of the day passed on, and not a trace of the departed one was seen. In vain they dwelt upon the consoling words he had spoken. The hope he had for a time re-awakened died out with the declining sun, and many a voice was raised against his treachery and want of love. "He is faithless," said some. "He forgets us, like his brother, in his new fortune," cried others. "The story of that other world is false," muttered the little set in the corner by themselves. Only a very few murmured to each other, "We will not despair."

One thing alone was certain, he did not return; and the disappointed crowds took refuge from thought as before, in the fiercest rapine and excitement, scattering destruction around them, wherever they moved.

Another day now elapsed, and then, in the early dawn following, the third and last brother crept slowly to a half-sleepy knot of his more particular friends, and roused them up.

"Look at my eyes," said he; "has not a sudden change come over them? They feel to me swelled and bursting, and yet I see with a clouded and imperfect vision. Doubtless it is with me now, as it was with our dear ones before they left us. I am oppressed, like

them. Like them, an invisible power is driving me upwards, as they were driven. Listen, then; for on my parting words you may depend. Let the other world be what it will, gorgeous beyond all we can fancy of it, blissful beyond all we can hope of it, do not fear in me an altered or forgetful heart. I dare not promise more. Yet, if it be possible, I will return. But, remember, there may well be that other world, and yet we, in ours, may misjudge its nature. Farewell, never part with hope. With your fears I know you never can part now. Farewell!"

And he too went upwards, through the cool water to the plants that bordered its side; and from the leaf of a golden king-cup he rose out of his native element into that aërial world, into which the Water-grub's eye never yet could pierce.

His companions lingered a while near the spot where he had disappeared, but neither sign nor sound came to them. Only the dreary sense of bereavement reminded them that he once had been.

Then followed the hours of vain expectation, the renewed disappointment, the cruel doubts, the hope that struggled with despair.

And after this, others went upwards in succession; for the time came to all when the lustrous eyes of the perfect creature shone through the masked face of the Grub, and he must needs pass forward to the fulfilment of his destiny.

But the result among those who were left was always the same. There were ever some that doubted and feared, ever some that disbelieved and ridiculed, ever some that hoped and looked forward.

Ah! if they could but have known, poor things! If those eyes, fitted for the narrow bounds of their water world, could have been endued with a power of vision into the purer element beyond, what a lifetime of anxiety would they not have been spared! What ease, what rest would have been theirs!

But belief would, in that case, have been an irresistible necessity, and Hope must have changed her name.

And the Dragon-fly, meanwhile, was he really faithless as they thought? When he burst his prison-house by the water-side, and rose on glittering wings into the summer air, had he indeed no memory for the dear ones he had so lately left? no tender concern for their griefs and fears? no recollection of the promise he had made?

Ah! so far from it, he thought of them amidst transports of his wildest flights, and returned ever and ever to the precincts of that world which had once been the only world to him. But in that region also, a power was over him superior to his own, and to it his will must submit. To the world of waters he could never more return.

The least touch upon its surface, as he skimmed over it with the purpose of descent, brought on a deadly shock, like that which, as a Water-grub, he had experienced from emerging into air, and his wings involuntarily bore him instantly back from the unnatural contact.

"Alas for the promise made in ignorance and presumption, miserable Grub that I was!" was his bitter, constantly-repeated cry.

And thus, divided and yet near, parted yet united by love, he hovered about the barrier that lay between them, never quite, perhaps, without a hope that some accident might bring his dear ones into sight.

Nor was his constancy long unrewarded, for as, after even his longest roamings, he never failed to return to the old spot, he was there to welcome the emancipated brother who so soon followed him.

And often, after that, the breezy air by the forest pond would resound in the bright summer afternoons with the clashing of Dragon-flies' wings, as, now back-

wards, now forwards, now to one side, now to another, without turn or intermission, they darted over the crystal water, in the rapture of a new life.

It might be, on those occasions, that some fresh arrival of kindred from below, added a keener joy to their already joyous existence. Sweet assuredly it was to each new-comer, when the riddle of his fate was solved, to find in the new region, not a strange and friendless abode, but a home rich with the welcomes of those who had gone before.

Sweet also it was, and strange as sweet, to know that even while they had been trembling and fearing in their ignorant life below, gleams from the wings of those they lamented were dropping like star-rays on their home, reflected hither and thither from the sun that shone above. Oh! if they could but have known!

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Beautiful forest pond, crowded with mysterious life, of whose secrets we know so little, who would not willingly linger by your banks for study and for thought? There, where the beech-tree throws out her graceful arms, glorying in the loveliness that is reflected beneath; there, where in the nominal silence the innocent birds pour out their music of joy. There, where the blue forget-me-not tells its story of old romance, and the long grasses bend over their pictured shadows; there, where the Dragon-flies still hover on the surface of the water, longing to reassure the hearts of the trembling race, who are still hoping and fearing below.

XI.

THE LAW OF THE WOOD.

"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good."
ROM. xv. 2.

"NEVER!"

What a word to be heard in a wood on an early summer morning, before the sun had quite struggled through the mists, and before the dew had left the flowers; and while all Nature was passing through the changes that separate night from day, adapting herself gently to the necessities of the hour.

"Never!"

What a word to come from a young creature, which knew very little more of what had gone before than of what was coming after, and who could not, therefore, be qualified to pronounce a very positive judgment upon anything. But, somehow or other, it is always the young and inexperienced who are most apt to be positive and self-willed in their opinions; and so, the young Spruce-fir, thinking neither of the lessons which Nature was teaching, nor of his own limited means of judging, stuck out his branches all around him in everybody's face, right and left, and said,—

"Never!"

It so startled a Squirrel, who was sitting in a neighbouring tree, pleasantly picking out the seeds of a fir-cone, that he dropped his treasured dainty to the ground; and springing from branch to branch, got up as high as he could, and then, looking down, remarked timidly to himself, "What can be the matter with the Spruce-firs?"

Nothing was the matter with the Spruce-firs, exactly;

but the history of their excitement was as follows:—They, and a number of other trees, were growing together in a pretty wood. There were oaks, and elms, and beeches, and larches, and firs of many sorts; and, here and there, there was a silver-barked Birch. And there was one silver-barked Birch in particular, who had been observing the Spruce-firs all that spring; noticing how fast they were growing, and what a stupid habit (as he thought) they had, of always getting into everybody's way, and never bending to accommodate the convenience of others.

He might have seen the same thing for some years before, if he had looked; but he was not naturally of an inquisitive disposition, and did not trouble himself with other people's affairs: so that it was only when the Spruce-fir next him had come so close that its branches fridged off little pieces of his delicate paper-like bark, whenever the wind was high, that his attention was attracted to the subject.

People usually become observant when their own comfort is interfered with, and this was the case here. However little the Birch might have cared for the Spruce-fir's behaviour generally, there was no doubt that it was very disagreeable to be scratched in the face; and this he sensibly felt, and came to his own conclusions accordingly.

At first, indeed, he tried to sidle and get out of the Fir's way, being himself of a yielding, good-natured character, but the attempt was quite a hopeless one. He could not move on one side a hundredth part as fast as the fir-branches grew; so that, do what he would, they came pushing up against him, and teased him all day.

It was quite natural, therefore, that the poor Birch should begin to look round him, and examine into the justice and propriety of such a proceeding on the part of the Spruce-firs; and the result was, that he considered their conduct objectionable in every way.

"For," said he, (noticing that there was a little grove of them growing close together just there,) "if they all go on shooting out their branches in that manner, how hot and stuffy they will get! Not a breath of air will be able to blow through them soon, and that will be very bad for their health; besides which, they are absolute pests to society, with their unaccommodating ways. I must really, for their own sakes, as well as my own, give them some good advice."

And accordingly, one morning,—that very early summer morning before described,—the Birch, having had his silvery bark a little more scratched than usual, opened his mind to his friends.

"If you would but give way a little, and not stick out your branches in such a very stiff manner on all sides, I think you would find it a great deal more comfortable for yourselves, and it would certainly be more agreeable to your neighbours. Do try!"

"You are wonderfully ready in giving unasked advice!" remarked the young Spruce-fir next the Birch, in a very saucy manner. "We are quite comfortable as we are, I fancy; and as to *giving way*, as you call it, what, or whom are we called upon to give way to, I should like to know?"

"To me, and to all your neighbours," cried the Birch, a little heated by the dispute.

On which the Spruce-fir next the Birch cried "Never!" in the most decided manner possible; and those beyond him cried "Never!" too; till at last, all the Spruce-firs, with one accord, cried "Never!" "Never!" "Never!" and half frightened the poor Squirrel to death. Every hair on his beautiful tail trembled with fright, as he peeped down from the top of the tree, wondering what could be the matter with the Spruce-firs.

And certainly, there was one thing the matter with them, for they were very obstinate; and as nobody can be very obstinate without being very selfish, there was more the matter with them than they themselves sus-

pected, for obstinacy and selfishness are very bad qualities to possess. But, so ignorant were they of their real character, that they thought it quite a fine thing to answer the Birch-tree's mild suggestion in such a saucy manner. Indeed, they actually gave themselves credit for the display of a firm, independent spirit; and so, while they shouted "Never!" they held out their branches as stiffly as possible towards each other, till they crossed and recrossed, and plaited together. On which they rĕmarked—

"What a beautiful pattern this makes! How neatly we fit in one with the other! How pretty we shall look when we come out green all over! Surely the Wood-pigeons would have been quite glad to have built their nests here if they had known. What a pity they did not, poor things! I hear them cooing in the elm-tree yonder, at a very inconvenient height, and very much exposed."

"Don't trouble yourselves about us," cooed the Wood-pigeons from their nest in the elm. "We are much happier where we are. We want more breeze and more leafy shade than you can give us in your close thick-growing branches."

"Everyone to his taste," exclaimed the young Spruce-fir, a little nettled by the Wood-pigeons' cool remarks; "if you prefer wind and rain to shelter, you are certainly best where you are. But you must not talk about leafy shade, because everyone knows that you can have nothing of it where you are, to what you will find here when we come out green all over."

"But when will that be?" asked the Wood-pigeons, in a gentle voice. "Dear friends, do you not know that the spring is over, and the early summer is begun, and all the buds in the forest are turned to leaves? And you yourselves are green everywhere outside, not only with your evergreen hue, but with the young summer's shoots. I sadly fear, however, that it is not so in your inner bowers."

"Perhaps, because we are evergreens, our sprouting may not go on so regularly as with the other trees," suggested one. But he felt very nervous at his foolish remark. It was welcomed, however, as conclusive by his friends, who were delighted to catch at any explanation of a fact which had begun to puzzle them.

So they cried out "Of course!" with the utmost assurance; and one of them added, "Our outer branches have been green and growing for some time, and doubtless we shall be green all over soon!"

"Doubtless!" echoed every Spruce fir in the neighbourhood, for they held fast by each other's opinions, and prided themselves on their family attachment.

"We cannot argue," cooed the Wood-pigeons in return. "The days are too short, even for love; how can there ever be time for quarrelling?"

So things went on in the old way, and many weeks passed over; but still the interlaced branches of the Spruce-firs were no greener than before. But beautiful little cones hung along the outermost ones; and, judging by its outside appearance, the grove of Firs looked to be in a most flourishing state.

Alas! however, all within was brown and dry; and the brownness and dryness spread further and further, instead of diminishing; and no wonder, for the summer was a very sultry one, and the confined air in the Fir-grove became close and unhealthy; and after heavy rains, an ill-conditioned vapour rose up from the earth, and was never dispersed by the fresh breezes of heaven.

Nevertheless, the Spruce-firs remained obstinate as ever. They grew on in their old way, and tried hard to believe that all was right.

"What can it matter," argued they, "whether we are green or not, inside? We are blooming and well everywhere else, and these dry branches don't signify much that I can see. Still, I do wonder what can be the reason of one part being more green than another."

"It is absurd for you to wonder about it," exclaimed

the Birch, who became more irritated every day. "There is not a tree in the world that could thrive and prosper, if it persisted in growing as you do. But it is of no use talking! You must feel and know that you are in each other's way every time you move; and in everybody else's way too. In *mine*, most particularly."

"My dear friend," retorted the Spruce-fir, "your temper makes you most absurdly unjust. Why, we make a point of never interfering with each other, or with anybody else! Our rule is to go our own way, and let everybody else do the same. Thus much we claim as a right."

"Thus much we claim as a right!" echoed the Spruce-fir grove.

"Oh, nonsense about a *right*," persisted the Birch. "Where is the good of having a right to make both yourself and your neighbours miserable? If we each of us lived in a field by ourselves, it would be all very well. Everyone might go his own way, then, undisturbed. But mutual accommodation is the law of the wood, or we should all be wretched together."

"My friend," rejoined the Spruce-fir, "you are one of the many who mistake weakness for amiability, and make a merit of a failing. We are of a different temper, I confess! We are, in the first place, *capable* of having ideas, and forming opinions of our own, which everybody is not; and, in the second place, the plans and habits we have laid down to ourselves, and which are not wrong in themselves, we are *courageous* enough to persist in, even to the death."

The Spruce-fir bristled all over with stiffness, as he refreshed himself by this remark.

"Even," inquired the Birch, in an ironical tone, "even at the sacrifice of your own comfort, and that of all around you?"

"You are suggesting an impossible absurdity," answered the vexed Spruce-fir, evasively. "What is neither wrong nor unreasonable in itself can do no

harm to anybody, and I shall never condescend to truckle to other people's whims as to my line of conduct. But there are plenty, who, to get credit for complaisance to their neighbours, would sacrifice their dearest principles without a scruple!"

"Come, come!" persisted the Birch; "let us descend from these heights. There are plenty of *other* people, my friend, who would fain shelter the most stupid obstinacy, and the meanest selfishness, behind the mask of firmness of character or principle,—or what not. Now what principle, I should like to know, is involved in your persisting in your stiff unaccommodating way of growing, except the principle of doing what you please at the expense of the feelings of other people?"

"Insolent!" cried the Spruce-fir; "we grow in the way which Nature dictates; and our right to do so must therefore be unquestionable. We possess, too, a character of our own, and are not like those who can trim their behaviour into an unmeaning tameness, to curry favour with their neighbours."

"I ought to be silent," cried the Birch, "for I perceive my words are useless. And yet, I would like you to listen to me a little longer. Does the Beech-tree sacrifice her character, do you think, when she bends away her graceful branches to allow room for the friend at her side to flourish too? Look, how magnificently she grows, stretching protectingly, as it were, among other trees; and yet, who so accommodating and yielding in their habits as she is?"

"It is her nature to be subservient; it is ours to be firm!" cried the Spruce-fir.

"It is her nature to throw out branches all round her, as it is that of every other tree," insisted the friendly Birch: "but she regulates the indulgence of her nature by the comfort and convenience of others."

"I scorn the example you would set me," cried the Spruce-fir; "it is that of the weakest and most supple of forest trees. Nay, I absolutely disapprove of the

tameness you prize so highly. Never, I hope, will you see us bending feebly about, and belying our character, even for the sake of flourishing in a wood!"

It was all in vain, evidently; so the Birch resolved to pursue the matter no further, but he muttered to himself,—

"Well, you will see the result."

On which the Spruce-fir became curious, and listened for more. The Birch, however, was silent; and at last the Spruce-fir made a sort of answer in a haughty, indifferent tone.

"I do not know what you mean by the result."

"You will know some day," muttered the Birch, very testily—for the fir-branches were fridging his bark cruelly, the wind having risen—"and even I shall be released from your annoyance, before long!"

"I will thank you to explain yourself in intelligible language," cried the Spruce-fir, getting uneasy.

"Oh! in plain words, then, if you prefer it," replied the Birch. "You are all of you dying."

"Never!" exclaimed the Spruce-fir; but he shook all over with fright as he uttered it. And when the other Spruce-firs, according to custom, echoed the word, they were as tremulous as himself.

"Very well, we shall see," continued the Birch. "Everyone is blind to his own defects, of course; and it is not pleasant to tell home truths to obstinate people. But there is not a bird that hops about the wood, who has not noticed that your branches are all turning into dry sticks; and before many years are over, there will be no more green outside than in. The flies and midges that swarm about in the close air round you, know it as well as we do. Ask the Squirrel what he thinks of your brown crackly branches, which would break under his leaps. And as to the Wood-pigeons, they gave you a hint of your condition long ago. But you are beyond a hint. Indeed, you are, I believe, beyond a cure."

They were, indeed; but a shudder passed through

the Fir-grove at these words, and they tried very hard to disbelieve them. Nay, when the winter came, they did disbelieve them altogether; for, when all the trees were covered with snow, no one could tell a dead branch from a live one; and, when the snow fell off, they who had their evergreen outside, had an advantage over many of the trees by which they were surrounded. It was a time of silence, too, and quiet, for the leafless trees were in a half-asleep state, and had no humour to talk. The evergreens were the only ones who, now and then, had spirit enough to keep up a little conversation.

At last, one day, the Spruce-firs decided to consult with a distant relation of their own, the Scotch-fir, on the subject. He formed one of a large grove of his own kind, that grew on an eminence in the wood. But they could only get at him through a messenger; and when the Squirrel, who was sent to inquire whether *he* ever gave way in his growth to accommodate others, came back with the answer that, "Needs must when there was no help!" the Spruce-firs voted their cousin a degraded being even in his own eyes, and scorned to follow an example so base.

Then they talked to each other of the ill-nature of the world, and tried to persuade themselves that the Birch had put the worst interpretation on their condition, merely to vex them; and told themselves, in conclusion, that they had nothing to fear. But their anxiety was great, and when another spring and summer succeeded to the winter, and all the other trees regained their leaves, and a general waking-up of life took place, a serious alarm crept over the Spruce-fir grove; for, alas! the brownness and dryness had spread still further, and less and less of green was to be seen on the thickest branches.

Had they but listened to advice, even then, all might have been well. Even the little birds told them how troublesome it was to hop about among

them. Even the Squirrel said he felt stifled if he ran under them for a cone. But they had got into their heads that it was a fine thing to have an independent spirit, and not mind what anybody said ; and they had a notion that it was a right and justifiable thing to go your own way resolutely, providing you allowed other people to do the same. But, with all their philosophy, they forgot that abstract theories are only fit for solitary life, and can seldom be carried out strictly in a wood.

So they grew on, as before, and the Birch-tree ceased to talk, for either his silver peel had all come off, and he was hardened ; or else he had taught himself to submit unmurmuringly to an evil he could not prevent. Certain it is, that no further argument took place, and the condition of the Spruce-firs attracted no further notice : till, one spring morning, several seasons later, the whole wood was startled by the arrival of its owner, a new master, who was come to pay his first visit among its glades.

The occasional sound of an axe-stroke, and a good deal of talking, were heard from time to time, for the owner was attended by his woodman : and at last he reached the Spruce-fir grove.

Alas ! and what an exclamation he gave at the sight, as well he might ; for nearly every one of the trees had fallen a victim to a selfish mistake, and had gradually died away. Erect they stood, it is true, as before, but dried, withered, perished monuments of an obstinate delusion. The owner and the woodman talked together for a time, and remarked to each other that half those trees ought to have been taken away years ago : that they were never fit to live in a cluster together ; for, from their awkward way of growing, they were half of them sure to die.

But of all the Grove there was but one who had life enough to hear these words ; and to him the experience came too late. All his old friends were in due time

cut down before his eyes; and he, who by an accident stood slightly apart, and had not perished with the rest, was only reserved in the hope that he might partially recover for the convenience of a Christmas-tree.

It was a sad, solitary summer he passed, though the fresh air blew freely round him now, and he rallied and grew, as well as felt invigorated by its sweet refreshing breath; and though the little birds sang on his branches, and chattered of happiness and love; for those who had thought with him and lived with him were gone, and their places knew them no more.

Ah, certainly there had been a mistake somewhere, but it did not perhaps signify much now to ascertain where; and no reproaches or ridicule were cast upon him by his neighbours: no, not even by the freed and happy silver-barked Birch; for a gentler spirit than that of rejoicing in other people's misfortunes prevailed in the pretty wood.

XII.

TRAINING AND RESTRAINING.

"Train up a child in the way he should go."—PROV. xxii. 6.

"WHAT a fuss is made about you, my dear little friends!" murmured the Wind, one day, to the flowers in a pretty villa garden. "I am really quite surprised at your submitting so patiently and meekly to all the troublesome things that are done to you! I have been watching your friend the Gardener for some time to-day; and now that he is gone at last, I am quite curious to hear what you think and feel about your unnatural bringing up."

"*Is* it unnatural?" inquired a beautiful *Convolvulus major*, from the top of a tapering fir-pole, up which she had crept, and from which her velvet flowers hung suspended like purple gems.

"I smile at your question," was the answer of the Wind. "You surely cannot suppose that in a natural state you would be forced to climb regularly up one tall bare stick such as I see you upon now. Oh dear, no! Your cousin, the wild convolvulus, whom I left in the fields this morning, does no such thing, I assure you. She runs along and climbs about, just as the whim takes her. Sometimes she takes a turn upon the ground; sometimes she enters a hedge, and plays at bo-peep with the birds in the thorn and nut-trees—twisting here, curling there, and at last, perhaps, coming out at the top, and overhanging the hedge with a canopy of green leaves and pretty white flowers. A very different sort of life from yours, with a Gardener always after you, trimming you in one place, fastening up a stray tendril in another, and fidgeting you all along—a sort of perpetual 'mustn't go here'—'mustn't go there.' Poor thing! I quite feel for you! Still I must say you make me smile; for you look so proud and self-conscious of beauty all the time, that one would think you did not know in what a ridiculous and dependent position you are placed."

Now the Convolvulus was quite abashed by the words of the Wind, for she was conscious of feeling very conceited that morning, in consequence of having heard the Gardener say something very flattering about her beauty; so she hung down her rich bell-flowers rather lower than usual, and made no reply.

But the Carnation put in her word: "What you say about the Convolvulus may be true enough, but it cannot apply to *me*. I am not aware that I have any poor relations in this country, and I myself certainly require all the care that is bestowed upon me. This climate is both too cold and too damp for me. My young plants

require heat, or they would not live; and the pots we are kept in protect us from those cruel wire-worms, who delight to destroy our roots."

"Oh!" cried the Wind, "our friend the Carnation is quite profound and learned in her remarks, and I admit the justice of all she says about damp and cold and wire-worms; but," and here the Wind gave a low-toned whistle, as he took a turn round the flower-bed—"but what I maintain, my dear, is, that when you are once strong enough and old enough to be placed in the soil, those Gardeners ought to let you grow and flourish as Nature prompts, and as you would do were you left alone. But no! forsooth, they must always be clipping, and trimming, and twisting up every leaf that strays aside out of the trim pattern they have chosen for you to grow in. Why not allow your silver tufts to luxuriate in a natural manner? Why must every single flower be tied up by its delicate neck to a stick, the moment it begins to open! Really, with your natural grace and beauty, I think you might be trusted to yourself a little more!"

And the Carnation began to think so too; and her colour turned deeper as a feeling of indignation arose within her at the childish treatment to which she had been subjected. "With my natural grace and beauty," repeated she to herself, "they might certainly trust me to myself a little more!"

Still the Rose-tree stood out that there must be some great advantages in a Gardener's care; for she could not pretend to be ignorant of her own superiority to all her wild relations in the woods. What a difference in size, in colour, and in fragrance!

Then the Wind assured the Rose he never meant to dispute the advantage of her living in a rich-soiled garden; only there was a natural way of growing, even in a garden; and he thought it a great shame for the gardeners to force the Rose-tree into an *un*natural way, curtailing all the energies of her nature. What could be

more outrageous, for example, than to see one rose growing in the shape of a bush on the top of the stem of another? "Think of all the pruning necessary," cried he, "to keep the poor thing in the round shape so much admired. And what is the matter with the beautiful straggling branches, that they are to be cut off as fast as they appear? Why not allow the healthy Rose-tree its free and glorious growth? Why thwart its graceful droopings or its high aspirings? Can it be *too* large or *too* luxuriant? Can its flowers be *too* numerous? Oh, Rose-tree, you know your own surpassing merits too well to make you think this possible!"

And so she did, and a new light seemed to dawn upon her as she recollected the spring and autumnal prunings she regularly underwent, and the quantities of little branches that were yearly cut from her sides, and carried away in a wheelbarrow. "It is a cruel and a monstrous system, I fear," said she.

Then the Wind took another frolic round the garden, and made up to the large white Lily, into whose refined ear he whispered a doubt as to the necessity or advantage of her thick powerful stem being propped up against a stupid, ugly stick! He really grieved to see it. Did that lovely creature suppose that Nature, who had done so much for her that the fame of her beauty extended throughout the world, had yet left her so weak and feeble that she could not support herself in the position most calculated to give her ease and pleasure? "Always this tying up and restraint!" pursued the Wind, with an angry puff. "Perhaps I am prejudiced; but as to be deprived of freedom would be to me absolute death, so my soul revolts from every shape and phase of slavery!"

"Not more than mine does!" cried the proud white Lily, leaning as heavily as she could against the strip of matting that tied her to her stick. But it was of no use—she could not get free; and the Wind only shook his sides and laughed spitefully as he left her.

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and then rambled away to talk the same shallow philosophy to the Honeysuckle that was trained up against a wall. Indeed, not a flower escaped his mischievous suggestions. He murmured among them all—laughed the trim-cut Box-edges to scorn—maliciously hoped the Sweet-peas enjoyed growing in a circle and running up a quantity of crooked sticks—and told the flowers, generally, that he should report their unheard-of submission and meek obedience wherever he went.

Then the white Lily called out to him in great wrath, and told him he mistook their characters altogether. They only submitted to these degrading restraints because they could not help themselves; but if he would lend them his powerful aid, they might free themselves from at least a part of the unnatural bonds which enthralled them.

To which the wicked Wind, seeing that his temptations had succeeded, replied, in great glee, that he would do his best; and so he went away, chuckling at the discontent he had caused.

All that night the pretty silly flowers bewailed their slavish condition, and longed for release and freedom: and at last they began to be afraid that the Wind had only been jesting with them, and that he would never come to help them, as he had promised. However, they were mistaken; for, at the edge of the dawn, there began to be a sighing and a moaning in the distant woods, and by the time the sun was up, the clouds were driving fast along the sky, and the trees were bending about in all directions; for the Wind had returned,—only now he had come in his roughest and wildest mood,—knocking over everything before him. "Now is your time, pretty flowers!" shouted he, as he approached the garden; and "Now is our time!" echoed the flowers tremulously, as, with a sort of fearful pleasure, they awaited his approach.

He managed the affair very cleverly, it must be confessed. Making a sort of eddying circuit round the

garden, he knocked over the Convolvulus-pole, tore the strips of bast from the stick that held up the white Lily, loosed all the Carnation flowers from their fastenings, broke the Rose-tree down, and levelled the Sweet-peas to the ground. In short, in one half-hour he desolated the pretty garden; and when his work was accomplished, he flew off to rave about his deed of destruction in other countries.

Meanwhile, how fared it with the flowers? The Wind was scarcely gone before a sudden and heavy rain followed, so that all was confusion for some time. But towards the evening the weather cleared up, and our friends began to look around them. The white Lily still stood somewhat upright, though no friendly pole supported her juicy stem; but, alas! it was only by a painful effort she could hold herself in that position. The Wind and the weight of rain had bent her forward once, beyond her strength, and there was a slight crack in one part of the stalk, which told that she must soon double over and trail upon the ground. The Convolvulus fared still worse. The garden beds sloped towards the south; and when our friend was laid on the earth—her pole having fallen—her lovely flowers were choked up by the wet soil which drained towards her. She felt the muddy weight as it soaked into her beautiful velvet bells, and could have cried for grief; she could never free herself from this nuisance. Oh that she were once more climbing up the friendly fir-pole! The Honeysuckle escaped no better; and the Carnation was ready to die of vexation, at finding that her coveted freedom had levelled her to the dirt.

Before the day closed, the Gardener came whistling from his farm work, to look over his pretty charges. He expected to see a few drooping flowers, and to find that one or two fastenings had given way. But for the sight that awaited him he was not prepared at all. Struck dumb with astonishment, he never spoke at first, but kept lifting up the heads of the trailing, dirtied

flowers in succession. Then at last he broke out in words of absolute sorrow :—"And to think of my mistress and the young lady coming home so soon, and that nothing can be done to these poor things for a fortnight, because of the corn harvest! It's all over with them, I fear;" and the Gardener went his way.

Alas! what he said was true; and before many days had passed, the shattered Carnations were rotted with lying in the wet and dirt on the ground. The white Lily was languishing discoloured on its broken stalk: the Convolvulus' flowers could no longer be recognized, they were so coated over with mud stains; the Honeysuckle was trailing along among battered Sweet-peas, who never could succeed in shaking the soil from their fragrant heads; and though the Rose-tree had sent out a few straggling branches, she soon discovered that they were far too weak to bear flowers—nay, almost to support themselves—so that they added neither to her beauty nor her comfort. Weeds meanwhile sprang up, and a dreary confusion reigned in the once orderly and brilliant little garden.

At length, one day before the fortnight was over, the housedog was heard to bark his noisy welcome, and servants bustled to and fro. The mistress had returned; and the young lady was with her, and hurried at once to her favourite garden. She came bounding towards the well-known spot with a song of joyous delight; but, on reaching it, suddenly stopped short, and in a minute after burst into a flood of tears! Presently, with sorrowing steps, she bent her way round the flower-beds, weeping afresh at every one she looked at; and then she sat down upon the lawn, and hid her face in her hands. In this position she remained, until a gentle hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"This is a sad sight, indeed, my darling," said her mother's voice.

"I am not thinking about the garden, mamma," replied the young girl, without lifting up her face;

"we can plant new flowers, and tie up even some of these afresh. I am thinking that now, at last, I understand what you say about the necessity of training and restraint, and culture, for us as well as for flowers."

"In a fallen world," interposed her mother.

"Yes,—because it is fallen," answered the daughter. "The wind has torn away these poor things from their fastenings, and they are growing wild whichever way they please; and I might perhaps once have argued that if it were their *natural* way of growing, it must therefore be the best. But I cannot say so, now I see the result. They are doing whatever they like, unrestrained; and the end is,—my beautiful GARDEN is turned into a WILDERNESS."

XIII.

GIFTS.

"Now there are diversities of gifts."—1 COR. xii. 4.

ONE—two—three—four—five; five neatly-raked kitchen-garden beds, four of them side by side, with a pathway between; the fifth a narrow slip, heading the others, and close to the gravel-walk, as it was for succession-crops of mustard and cress, which are often wanted in a hurry for breakfast or tea.

Most people have stood by such beds in their own kitchen-gardens on soft spring mornings and evenings, and looked for the coming up of the seeds which either they or the gardener had sown.

Radishes in one, for instance, and of all three sorts—white-turnip, red-turnip, and long-tailed.

Carrots in another; and this bed had been dug very deep indeed—subsoil digging, as it were; two spades' depth, that the roots might strike freely down.

Onions in another. Beets in the fourth; both the golden and red varieties: while the narrow slip was half mustard and half cress.

Such was the plan here, however; and here, for a time, all the seeds lay sleeping, as it seemed. For, as the long smooth-raked beds stretched out dark and bare under the stars, they betrayed no symptoms of anything going on within.

Nevertheless, there was no sleeping in the case. The little seed-grains were fulfilling the law of their being, each after its kind; the grains, all but their inner germs, decaying; the germs swelling and growing, till they rose out of their cradles, and made their way, through their earthen coverlid, to the light of day.

They did not all come up quite together, of course, nor all quite alike. But as to the time, the gardener had made his arrangements so cleverly, that none was very far behind his neighbour. And as to the difference of shape in the first young leaves, what could it signify? It is true the young mustards were round and thick; the cresses oval and pointed; the carrots mere green threads; the onions sharp little blades; while the beets had an odd, stainy look. But they all woke up to the same life and enjoyment, and were all greeted with friendly welcome, as they appeared, by the dew, and light, and sunshine, and breezes, so necessary to them all, children of one mother, dependent on the same influences to bring them to perfection.

What *could* put comparisons, and envyings, and heart-burnings into their heads, so filling them either with conceit or melancholy misgivings? As if there was but one way of being right or doing right; as if every creature was *not* good after its kind, but must needs be good after somebody else's kind, or not be good at all!

It must have been some strolling half-informed grub,

one would think, who had not yet come to his full senses, who started such foolish ideas.

It began with an inquiry at first, for no actual unkindness was meant.

"I find I get deeper and deeper into the soil every day," remarked the Carrot. "I shall be I don't know how long, at last. I have been going down regularly, quite straight, for weeks. Then I am tapering off to a long point at the end, in the most beautiful proportions possible. A traveller told me, the other day, this was perfection, and I believe he was right."

(That mischievous vagabond grub, you see!)

"I know what it was to live near the surface in my young days," the Carrot went on; "but never felt solid enjoyment till I struck deeply down, where all is so rich and warm. This is really being firmly established and satisfactory to oneself, though still progressing, I hope, for I don't see why there should be a limit. Pray tell me, neighbours," added he, good-naturedly enough, "how it fares with all the rest of you? I should like to know that your roots are as long, and slim, and orange-coloured as mine; doing as well, in fact, and sinking as far down. I wish us to be all perfect alike. Perfection is the great thing to try for."

"When you are sure you are trying in the right way," sneered a voice from the neighbouring radish bed (the red and white turnip variety were always satirical). "But if the long, slim, orange roots, striking deep into the earth, are your idea of perfection, I advise you to begin life over again. Dear me! I wish you had consulted us before. Why, we stopped going down long ago, and have been spreading out sideways and all ways, into stout, round, solid balls ever since, close white flesh throughout, inside; and not orange, but red, without."

"White, he means," shouted another.

"Red, I call it," repeated the first. "But no matter; certainly not orange!"

And "Certainly not orange!" cried they all.

"So," continued the first speaker, "we are quite concerned to hear you ramble on about growing longer and longer, and strongly advise you to keep your own counsel, and not mention it to anyone else. We are friends, you know, and can be trusted; but you really must leave off wasting your powers and energy in the dark inside of the ground, out of everybody's sight and knowledge. Come to the surface, and make the most of it, as we do, and then you'll be a credit to your friends. Never mind what travellers say. They've nothing else to do but to walk about and talk, and they tell us we are perfection too. Don't trust to them, but do what we tell you now, and alter your course at once. Roll yourself up into a firm round ball as fast as you can. You won't find it hard if you once begin. You have only to——"

"Let me put in a word first," interrupted one of the long-tailed Radishes in the same bed; "for it is of no use to go out of one extreme into another, which you are on the high road to do if you are disposed to take Mr. Roundhead's advice; who, by the way, ought to be ashamed of forcing his very peculiar views upon his neighbours. Just look at us. We always strike moderately down, so we know it's the right thing to do, and that solid round balls are the most unnatural and useless things in the world. But, on the other hand, my dear friend, we have learnt where to stop, and a great secret it is, but one I fear you know nothing about at present; so the sooner you make yourself acquainted with it the better. There's a limit to everything but folly—even to striking deep into the soil. And as to the soil being better so very far down, nobody can believe it; for why should it be? The great art is to make the most of what is at hand, as we do. Time enough to go into the depths when you have used up what is so much easier got at. The man who gathered some of us yesterday called out, 'These

are just right.' So I leave you to judge whether some other people we know of must not be wrong."

"You rather overwhelm me, I own," mused the Carrot; "though it's remarkable that you counsellors should not agree among yourselves. Is it possible, however, that I have been making a great mistake all my life? What lost time to look back upon! Yet a ball; no, no, not a ball! I don't think I could grow into a solid round ball were I to try for ever!"

"Not having tried, how can you tell?" whispered the Turnip-Radish persuasively. "But you never will, if you listen to our old-fashioned friend next door, who has been halting between two opinions all his life;—will neither make an honest fat lump of it, as I do, nor plunge down and taper with you. But nothing can be done without an effort: certainly no change."

"That is true," murmured the Carrot, rather sadly; "but I am too old for further efforts myself. Mistake or no mistake, my fate is fixed. I am too far down to get up again, that's certain; but some of the young ones may try. Do you hear, dears? Some of you stop short, if you can, and grow out sideways and all ways, into stout, round, solid balls."

"Oh, nonsense about round balls!" cried the long-tailed Radish in disgust; "what will the world come to, if this folly goes on! Listen to me, youngsters, I beg. Go to a moderate depth, and be content; and if you want something to do, throw out a few fibres for amusement. You're firm enough without them, I know, but the employment will pass away time."

"There are strange delusions abroad just now," remarked the Onions to each other; "do you hear all this talk about shape and way of growth? and everybody in the dark on the subject, though they seem to be quite unconscious of the fact themselves. That fellow chattered about solid balls, as if there was no such thing as bulbs, growing layer upon layer, and coat over coat, at all. Of course the very long orange

gentleman, with his tapering root, is the most wrong of the whole party; but I doubt if Mr. Roundhead is much wiser when he speaks of close white flesh inside, and red (of all ridiculous nonsense) without. Where are their flaky skins, I should like to know? Who is ever to peel them, I wonder? Poor things! I can't think how they got into such ways. How tough and obstinate they must be! I wish we lived nearer. We would teach them a little better than that, and show them what to do."

"*I* have lived near you long enough," grumbled a deep-red Beet in the next bed; "and you have never taught me; neither shall you, if I can help it. A pretty instructor you would be, who think it ridiculous to be red! I suppose you can't grow red yourself, and so abuse the colour out of spite. Now I flatter myself I am red inside as well as out, so I suppose I am more ridiculous than your friend who contrives to keep himself white within, according to his own account; but I doubt the fact. There, there! it is a folly to be angry; so I say no more, except this: get red as fast as you can. You live in the same soil that I do, and ought to be able."

"Oh, don't call it red!" exclaimed a golden Beet, who was of a gentle turn of mind; "it is but a pale tint after all, and surely rather amber than red; and perhaps that was what the long-tailed orange gentleman meant."

"Perhaps it was; for perhaps he calls red orange, as you call it amber," answered the redder Beet; "anyhow he has rather more sense than our neighbour here, with his layer upon layer, and coat over coat, and flaky skin over all. Think of wasting time in such fiddle faddle proceedings! Grow a good honest fleshy substance, and have done with it, and let people see you know what life is capable of. I always look at results. It is something to get such a body as I do out of the surrounding soil. That is living to some

purpose, I consider. Nobody makes more of their opportunities than I do, I flatter myself, or has more to show for their pains; and a great future must be in store."

"Do you hear them? oh! do you hear them?" whispered the Cress to her neighbour the Mustard (there had been several crops, and this was one of the last;) "do you hear how they all talk together of their growth, and their roots, and their bulbs, and size, and colour, and shape? It makes me quite unhappy, for I am doing nothing like that myself—nothing, nothing, though I live in the same soil! What is to be done? What do *you* do? Do you grow great white solid balls, or long, orange, tapering roots, or thick red flesh, or bulbs with layer upon layer, and coat over coat? Some of them talked of just throwing out a few fibres as a mere amusement to pass away time; and this is all I ever do for business. There will never be a great future in store for me. Do speak to me, but whisper what you say, for I shame to be heard or thought of."

"I grow only fibres too," groaned the Mustard in reply; "but I would spread every way and all ways if I could—downwards and upwards, and side ways and all ways, like the rest. I wish I had never been sown. Better never to be sown and grown, than sown and grown to such trifling purpose! We are wretched indeed. But there must be injustice somewhere. The soil must give them what it refuses to us."

"Or we are weak and helpless, and cannot take in what it offers," suggested the Cress. "Alas! that we should have been sown only to be useless and unhappy!"

And they wept the evening through. But they alone were not unhappy. The Carrot had become uneasy, and could follow his natural tastes no longer in comfort, for thinking that he ought to be a solid round ball, white inside and red without. The Onion had sore misgivings that the Beet might be right after all, and a good honest mass of red flesh be more worth

labouring for than the pale coat-within-coat growth in which he had indulged. It did seem a waste of trouble, a fiddle-faddle plan of life, he feared. Perhaps he had not gone down far enough in the soil. Some one talked of growing fibres for amusement—he had certainly not come to that; they were necessary to his support; he couldn't hold fast without them. Other people were more independent than he was, then; perhaps wiser,—alas!

And yet the Beet himself was not quite easy; for talk as he would, what he had called fiddle-faddle seemed ingenious when he thought it over, and he would like to have persuaded himself that he grew layer upon layer too. But it wouldn't do.

Perhaps, in fact, the bold little Turnip-Radishes alone, from their solid, substantial growth, were the only ones free from misgivings, and believed that everybody ought to do as they did themselves.

What a disturbance there was, to be sure! And it got worse and worse, and they called on the winds and fleeting clouds, the sun, and moon, and stars above their heads, to stay their course a while, and declare who was right and who was wrong; who was using, who abusing, his gifts and powers; who was making most, who least, of the life and opportunities they all enjoyed; whose system was the one the rest must all strive to follow—the one only right.

But they called and asked in vain; till one evening, the clouds which had been gathering over the garden for days began to come down in rain, and sank swiftly into the ground, where it had been needed for long. Whereupon there was a general cry, "Here comes a messenger; now we shall hear!" as if they thought no one could have any business in the world but to settle their disputes.

So out came the old inquiries again:—who was right—who was wrong—who had got hold of the true secret? But the Cress made no inquiry at all, only

shook with fright under the rain; for, thought she, the hour of my shame and degradation is come; poor useless creature that I am, I shall never more hold up my head!

As to the Carrot, into whose well-dug bed the rain found easiest entrance and sank deepest, he held forth in most eloquent style upon the whole affair;—how it was started, and what he had said; how much he had once hoped; how much he now feared.

Now, the Rain-drops did not care to answer in a hurry; but as they came dropping gently down, they murmured, "Peace, peace, peace!" all over the bed. And truly they seemed to bring peace with them as they fell, so that a calm sank all around, and then the murmur proceeded:—"Poor little atoms in a boundless kingdom—each one of you bearing a part towards its fulness of perfection, each one of you endowed with gifts and powers especially your own, each one of you good after its kind—how came these cruel misgivings and heart-burnings among you? Are the tops of the mountains wrong because they cannot grow corn like valleys? Are the valleys wrong because they cannot soar into the skies? Does the brook flow in vain because it cannot spread out like the sea? Is the sea only right because only its waters are salt? Each good after its kind, each bearing a part in the full perfection of the kingdom which is boundless, the plan which is harmony—peace, peace, peace upon all!"

And peace seemed to fall more soothingly than ever upon the ground as the shower continued to descend.

"How much more, then," resumed the murmur, "among you, to whose inner natures gifts and powers are given, each different from each; each good in its kind; each, if rightly carried out, doing service in that kingdom, which needs for its full perfection that there shall be mountains to rise into the skies, valleys to lie low at their feet; some natures to go deep into the soil, others to rejoice on its surface; some to lie lightly

upon the earth, as if scarcely claiming a home, others to grasp at it by wide-spread roots, and stretch out branches to the rivers; all good in their kind, all bearing a part in the glory of that universe whose children are countless as their natures are various—none useless, none in vain.

"Upon one, then, upon all—each wanted, each useful, each good after its kind—peace, peace, peace, peace, peace!" . . .

The murmur subsided to a whisper, the whisper into silence; and by the time the moon-shadows lay upon the garden there was peace everywhere.

Nor was it broken again; for henceforth even the Cress held up her head—she, also, good after her kind.

Only once or twice, that year, when the Carrots were gathered, there came up the strangest growths—thick, distorted lumps, that had never struck properly down.

The gardener wondered, and was vexed, for he prided himself on the digging of the carrot-bed. "Anything that had had any sense might have gone down into it, he was sure," he said. And he was not far wrong; but you see the Carrot had had no sense when he began to speculate, and tried to be something he was not intended to be.

Yet the poor clumsy thing was not quite useless, after all. For, just as the gardener was about to fling it angrily away, he recollected that the cook might use it for soup, though it could not be served up at table—such a shape as it was! . . .

And this was exactly what she did.